

STORIES OF THE SUN



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INTRODUCTION

Around Easter 1921, Sannerz, the community that later became known as the Bruderhof, published a small volume of stories under the title *Legenden* (“legends”). Illustrated with scissor-cuts and designed to fit into the pocket of a hiker, *Legenden* was clearly a book for and by the youth movement then in flower across Europe. For young men and women who rejected the conventions of the church-going bourgeoisie but still sought spiritual truth, legends could do what sermons and theological texts could not: touch the reader’s heart in a natural but powerful way, without pious words. As Eberhard Arnold, one of Sannerz’s founders, put it:

Not everyone grasps what deep inner values are concealed in the simple folklore of fairy tales and legends. These stories, through the most varied forms, all bring to light our longing for redemption. They show how the demand for justice is tested and proved by suffering and conflict. In the world of fairy tales, the victory of good over evil is constantly being fought for. The blessing of work, the overcoming of fear, the power of love, and an abundance of practical wisdom—all these come close to our hearts, carried along by rich humor.

Legends and folk tales have been part of the Bruderhof ever since. At Sannerz, the story of Rachoff captivated the children to such an extent that they formed a “sun troop” and dreamt of becoming itinerant messengers for God. Two decades later, Parsifal and the Grail made

a lifelong impression on the next generation of Bruderhof children, many of whom participated in a memorable dramatization of the story. Those who grew up at the community during the 1970s will never forget Heinrich Arnold's re-tellings of "Tipp and His Light," "The Pair of Shoes," and other stories, especially those taken from the novels of Dostoevsky.

Throughout the community's history, stories like "The Sacred Flame" have been read in preparation for Easter or Advent as a means of bringing to expression the essence of the holiday. Bruderhof members—Lene Schulz, Emmy Arnold, and Trudi Hüsey, to name a few—copied these and other stories over and over again, by hand, and gave them as gifts. In this way they passed on a rich literary legacy, and saved many gems that might otherwise have been lost.

And now, as Eberhard Arnold wrote to a friend, "Our legends are coming out in a new edition, and will spread the good news. They are especially for people who don't have time for many hours of reflection, and for children."

HELIOEPHER

As told by Hardy Arnold

Once upon a time there was a race which was lost in a great, dark forest. The trees stood so close together that the light of the sun could not penetrate the thickly entwined branches. There were also numerous wild animals which fell upon the people, especially the children, when they wandered too far from their parents while they were playing. So everyone lived in a constant state of fear of death and destruction, and a hopeless despair took hold of the hearts of the folk.

Continuous black darkness had strangled all the light in their hearts. They could not love one another any more. They even hated and murdered one another in their rage. Yet they were forced to remain together, for it was impossible for any single man to defend himself against the attacks of the wild beasts. They had lost all hope of ever finding their way out of the forest. Many of the young people did not believe in the light they had never seen, and they mocked their elders, when, with a last weak light gleaming in their dim eyes, they recounted tales of the festive, sunny days of their youth.

Among the people however, there was a young man called Heliopher. He was very much alone, grieving over the misery of his people, and seeking a way of salvation. He bore in his heart an endless longing for light and love in the desolation which surrounded him. Heliopher left his people to seek the sun. For many months and years he wandered

through the dangers of the forest and of his own soul, and often, very often, nearly lost all hope and confidence. But Heliopher bravely withstood his enemies, whether within himself or around him, and at last he reached the edge of the forest and saw the light of the sun. In terrible amazement he fell into a swoon, and when he awoke he saw in the twilight that he was watched over in his slumber by beautiful people. In the green meadows stood the simple huts of the sun-people, and Heliopher lived with them in peace and endless joy as the most beloved amongst living men.

Then Heliopher went back to the forest to seek his people. "Come, brothers and sisters," he said to them, "I will lead you to the light." At this there was murmuring and frowning, wavering and hesitation, wonder and questioning, incredulous laughter, and finally a jubilant "Yes!" And then, at last, the longed-for departure.

Then the light of the sun shone in Heliopher's eyes, but the way was long and difficult, and demanded much suffering and sacrifice, and murmuring arose among the people. Some spoke and said, "Let us murder him, the betrayer of the people!" And the dark glow of hatred was in their eyes. Others were wiser and said, "No! let us judge him in the presence of all, for it is dangerous to give the people a martyr." And Heliopher spoke to his people, and talked about light and love. But the wise ones answered, "You lie! There is no light, there is no sun, there is no love. Let us be darker than the forest and more cruel than the wild beasts. Then we shall be masters of the forest!"

Heliopher answered in great pain, "O believe not, ye wise men, that ye can be victorious over darkness by being more dark, that ye can overcome the wild beasts by being more beastly. Only love is stronger. Only the light of the sun can drive away darkness."

"Be silent!" said the wise men. "There is no light, there is no sun!"

And the people shouted, flinging their arms about in raging despair, "There is no light, there is no sun!"

But Heliopher called out, "Follow me!" And with his nails he tore open his breast, and his heart burned with love, and it glowed and shed its beams through the dark forest. Then he took it in both hands, held it high over his head, and strode forth in front of the people.

In reverent wonder and silence the multitude followed the burning heart.

And the people went in jubilation towards the sun, and danced in its loving rays, and they loved one another. But Heliopher knelt down at the edge of the forest, and with the last strength of his outstretched arms he held up his loving, pulsing heart to the light of heaven, and gave his last smile to his people.

THE ATONEMENT

Ludwig von Gerdtehl

Imagine a king—a true father of his country, kind and just toward all his subjects—who had to contend with a powerful revolutionary party that wanted to raise its leader to the throne.

One day this king noticed that important state and family papers had been stolen from his desk. He was beside himself because of the possibility of a political scandal that could arise through the misuse of these stolen papers and immediately had his heralds proclaim the following decree: “I swear by God and my honor as king that I shall, without fail, execute anyone who misuses the stolen papers against my throne and the welfare of the State, and that anyone who dares again to steal my secret papers shall be punished publicly with a hundred strokes of the lash, no matter who it is.”

To the king’s great pain, a few days after this decree was published a palace guard seized the king’s dearly loved mother and his two sisters just as they were about to open the king’s secret cabinet with a master key. Investigations proved beyond doubt that all three were participants in the conspiracy. Every newspaper in the kingdom immediately printed the news that the thieves, in the person of the queen mother and the two princesses, were caught in the act and that their guilt was proven. Some articles emphasized in a spiteful manner that His Majesty now had an unusual opportunity to show his much-vaunted justice, and to prove to the opposition that he placed the laws of the kingdom above his selfish family interests.

The queen mother and the king's two sisters fell on their knees before the king and promised to give up all connection with the rebels and to be all the more faithful to him in the future. The king did not doubt the sincerity of their remorse. In his double position as son and ruler he now came into a terrible agony of heart and conscience. He locked himself into his study for a day and did not eat or drink. The king in him became a tyrant toward the mother's son he was and demanded equal rights for all. The son and brother in him, on the other hand, became a rebel against the king and demanded pardon.

What was he to do? If he carried out his decree, he must allow his dearly loved mother, as well as his own sisters, to be publicly disgraced by the executioner. He knew that they would not survive the shame and suffering of this dreadful punishment. But if he did not carry out his proclamation, he would stand perjured, unjust, and dishonored before his whole people and his enemies. And yet he knew that only the personal trust of his people in his justice, honesty, and generosity could save his throne and the state. Thus the conspiracy had penetrated into the heart of the king himself. What was he to do? The one was just as impossible for him as the other.

On the following morning, after a terrible night, the king ordered the executioner and the people to assemble before the palace. Many thousands crowded around the throne that had been hastily erected in the palace square. Finally the king came, leading his trembling old mother reverently by the arm, while his sisters, burning with shame, followed them. Then the king, pale but strong and composed, stepped beneath the canopy of his throne and spoke to the crowd, which immediately became deathly still. "So that my people and my enemies may see that in my kingdom there is equal justice for all, I now hand over my own mother to the executioner, so that the punishment merited according to my decree shall be carried out before these witnesses." A

dreadful moment followed. Broken, the king sank down in his throne, burying his pale face in his hands to hide his tears. The princesses, their backs to the crowd, had broken down sobbing before the throne. For one moment, the humming of the whip was heard.

Then—just as the executioner was about to strike the old woman mercilessly—the king sprang up, threw himself against the executioner and called out with a voice like a lion, awakening echoes from the palace walls, “Give me the hundred strokes! But let these three go!”

And without a sound, the king endured the hundred whiplashes. Half an hour later he was carried, half-dead and streaming with blood, into his palace. The crowd was silent, and even his greatest enemies had tears in their eyes.

The king recovered slowly from this terrible chastisement. But with his actions, he had won over his opponents and from then on he was beloved by all his people. Thus, by his wisdom, justice, and love, the king saved his kingdom and his family from ruin.

SEBASTIAN: SAINT OF THE SLUMS

Franz Herwig

It was late in the day and Sebastian, as was his custom, was sitting on the second terrace of the cloister garden. He was staring at the river which shot past at the foot of the rock in a sharp curve, its green waters capped with foam and roaring loudly. On the lowest terrace the Prior, white-haired and stooped, was cutting off the withered roses and collecting them in a basket. The sound of his snipping could not be heard above the roar of the water that rebounded off the steep wooded mountainside across the river.

Behind Sebastian's black-robed figure stood the falcon's cage, way up on the highest of the terraces. The bird's yellow eyes stared up into the empty sky. An overpowering stench of refuse and half-rotten animal remains—accompanied by the tangible rebellion and anger of the untamable bird of prey—rose through the iron bars of its prison into the still air.

Sebastian unclasped his hands and groped for his breviary, as though seeking something to hold onto. On this, the day of Saint Chrysostom, the reading was from the tenth chapter of Matthew. The monk closed his eyes as though lost in thought. Then he glanced over the lines. There was the command, black on white, inescapable: "Ecco, ego mitto vos sicut oves in medio luporum! Behold, I send you out as sheep among wolves!"

At that moment, it was as though a burning light cut into Sebastian like a sword. He lowered the book and raised his hands involuntarily, as if to shield himself from an overpowering force. The Word that had entered into him with a powerful glow began to radiate from within, and his heart suddenly sprang to life inside him, beating ever faster.

Suddenly Sebastian had a vision. He saw enormous packs of wolves milling around and tearing each other to pieces. Giantesses as tall as the clouds rose up above the confusion and breathed black, yellow, and green smoke with a sound like crashing waves, crying, "Here they are, here are the wolves. The torrent of wolves is rising higher and higher."

The monk heard the roaring of the flood: no, it wasn't the river, which had dinned its dull roar into his ears all these years. It was another flood, the rising torrent of wolves. But where were the apostles, the lambs to whom Christ had said, "Go forth"? In his vision, Sebastian made every effort to find them, but they were nowhere to be seen. Where were the disciples who had been given the command, "Praedicate omni creaturae, Preach to all creation"? Did they not have the courage and faith to tread upon the seething flood, as their Lord had walked upon the Sea of Galilee?

"What am I doing, egotist that I am," thought the monk, "sitting here on this island of peace, seeking the salvation of my soul? My God, I have been sitting here for twelve long years, and outside, the Anti-christ is raging, and I might have sat here another twelve years, perhaps even to the end of my days, had not Thy fiery sword pierced my soul. O Lord!"

He sprang up with a sudden jerk. The falcon behind him shook his feathers. Sebastian descended the steps to the lower terrace, and stood before the Prior. "See, my son," said the Prior, "with what ardor my roses glow! They have hesitated a long time, and I even thought that the cloudy weather and cold winds had taken away their desire to bloom.

But now, when the right hour has come, they burst open in force a hundred-fold. The Spirit blows where He will.”

Sebastian answered, “Father, I ask you, tell me whom the words, ‘Make disciples of all nations,’ and ‘I send you out as sheep among wolves’ were meant for, and what is to be understood by ‘all nations,’ and who are to be compared to the wolves?”

The Prior replied, “It is the disciples who were sent out, and these words apply to all who would follow in their footsteps. The meaning of ‘all nations’ is quite clear, and as for the wolves, without a doubt those wild and untamable souls are meant, without whom there would be no martyrs.”

But Sebastian went on to ask, “Have the disciples and those who succeeded them really listened to this call?”

“Without a doubt,” the old monk replied. “Do you not know, my son, of those saint-like men who have gone out among the black and yellow and brown heathen—like lambs among wolves?”

Sebastian was quick to reply, “Have just as many men left everything behind to go among the heathen who are white?”

The Prior shook his head and said, “What a strange question, my son! Every priest fulfills this task.”

“Does he really?” the young monk asked. “Does he really go like a lamb into the wolves’ den? Doesn’t he in reality rather remain far off, where he can barely hear the wolves howl? Doesn’t he take good care not to get too near their fiery breath? Where are the disciples of Jesus who proclaim him in the marketplaces and in front of the town halls, who live with the beasts, dwelling together in the same cage, and go unbidden to the white brothers and address them as ‘brother’? Don’t they rather sit comfortably in their well-furnished rooms, waiting for the wolves to come to them? Don’t they stand in front of their beautifully vaulted churches and wait for them to come? Don’t they sit there,

enthroned in their carefully secluded confessional boxes, waiting for the wolves? Yes, it is true, they are waiting, and they won't have to wait much longer; the wolves will come like a deluge, and those who have waited will be swept away and carried off, along with their rooms and their churches and confessionals! Aren't their bodily needs more important to them than God's commands? Don't they love themselves more than the immortal souls of their brothers, imprisoned within the bodies of the wolves?"

At these words, the falcon uttered a shrill cry. But the Prior spoke indignantly, "Sebastian, why do you set yourself up as a judge over others?"

Sebastian knelt before him and said, "Father, I wish to judge no one. But see, this comes from my heart's bitterest need. You know how much I have prayed throughout the years. And yet a dull unrest would never leave me. Just now, when I read from the breviary the Word of God, 'Be-hold, I send you out as sheep among wolves,' it went through me like a burning sword. Mustn't men have been sinned against enormously to turn into wolves? And hasn't much been neglected on their behalf if they are still wolves? And isn't it just those who received the command 'Go forth!' who are guilty of this sin and neglect? Oh, most reverend Father, what is there to prevent us from starting straight away to do what God demands of us?"

"Son," the Prior said, "the Holy Rule prevents us."

"Then, oh Father," the young man answered impetuously, "let us break the Holy Rule to pieces."

At this, the Prior raised his hands in protest and cried, "What spirit has entered into you?"

Sebastian answered joyfully, "The Spirit blows where He will. I know we live a life devoted to holiness. Our eyes and our whole will are directed towards the purification and clarification of our souls, and

whatever merit we gain flows into that treasury of grace that God imparts to sinful men. To achieve this we have buried ourselves in isolation and have with-drawn from the world. But how does this go along with God's commands 'Go forth!' and 'Behold, I send you'?"

The old man answered, "Men have different natures. Some are made for peace and quiet and others for struggle."

"But where are those who were made for struggle?" Sebastian answered. "I do not see them anywhere. I have heard God's call in my soul, even if no one else has, and I beg of you, reverend Father, allow me to follow that call. Send me, I pray, into the world. Send me among the wolves."

The Prior was surprised and disquieted, and finally he said, "I cannot send you. If you go nevertheless, you will be breaking your vow, and nothing good ever comes about as a result of sin."

Sebastian thought about this and then replied, "Am I not being obedient in a deeper sense if I follow the call of Him who is above all rules?"

"My dear son," the Prior responded, "we often deceive ourselves, and the snares the Evil One sets us are many and ever again new. Often, when we think we are hearing the call of God, it is in fact the voice of vanity, insubordination, and earthly will. Test yourself deeply in this, my son."

Upon these words, Sebastian was again silent for a while, looking into himself and listening. Then he spoke in a quiet voice, "I will indeed test myself, Father. Let me go and spend some time in the hermitage. Pray for me in the meantime!"

The Prior granted Sebastian his request and let him go with his blessing.

Sebastian got ready quickly and went across the mountains to a high bare rock on which stood a very small and humble chapel with a half-

ruined hut attached. For the past many years it had not been used, as the brothers had no time to visit it on account of all their preaching and praying. Not a single leaf grew up there, not a flower bloomed, nor was there any human habitation to be seen as far as the eye could roam. On the other hand, the first flaming rays of the sun fell on this peak, as did the last. Constellations glimmering further and further into the distance led one's gaze to penetrate the depths of the night sky. Often in between, clouds—arrogantly white, sullen gray, or fanatically dark—obscured Earth's relation to the Eternal.

Here at this place Sebastian remained to test himself. He fathomed his motives, inclinations, and thoughts, taking each and every stirring of his soul and examining it. Every sixth day, a lay brother came up from the cloister and brought Sebastian what was necessary to meet his bodily needs. Each time, the brother asked Sebastian to return with him, and each time he refused. But our hermit pondered the life and passion of our Savior in his heart, and his love for God and men grew ever more intense.

At times he had visions of immeasurable hosts in constantly renewed throngs, streaming past the Cross of Christ like a tremendous river rushing and plunging into the eternal darkness of a black abyss. Wandering souls reeled helplessly like butterflies above this torrent. Sebastian's anxiety for men and their souls grew so strong within him that he cast himself upon the ground as if struggling against death itself. The evil spirit stood coldly at his side and hissed into his ear that he was tormenting himself in vain.

"You poor little monk, you can't stop the victory of the Anti-Christ. Men are falling away from God like leaves from the trees in autumn. The leaves are rustling as the pile grows thicker and soon God will stand alone and quite bare." How indeed could he, Sebastian, presume to do battle with the Anti-Christ in the name of God to save the world?

Would it not be far wiser to think of his own perfection, to see to it that he could stand on the right hand of the Judge on the day of Judgement? Go back to the monastery, Sebastian, and humble yourself!

But then it seemed to him that the long drawn-out howl of hungry wolves was carried on the night wind. "Go out among them," God urged, "they hunger after me and know it not. They consume one another in their passion, they tear each other to pieces, and the howl of hunger proceeds anew from jaws still dripping with the blood and refuse of devoured entrails. Go, Sebastian, and satisfy their need. Go, Sebastian, if you want to stand at my right hand on the Day of Judgement."

The lay brother from the monastery came to the hermit nine times in all, at intervals of six days. When he came the tenth time, he found Sebastian ready to descend to the world with him.

The Prior received him with great joy. But Sebastian told him he didn't want to stay, but must prepare to go on his way that very day. His face shone with a great and fervent peace, so that the Prior stifled the anger that was rising in him and only repressed a deep sigh. Sebastian knelt down in front of him and asked him, "Bless me, Father!" As he felt the trembling hands of the old graybeard on his head, he noticed that at the same time two hot tears fell upon his face.

He went to a peasant who rented land from the monastery and asked for an old garment which had belonged to one of his sons who had fallen in the Great War. He put it on instead of his habit.

The brothers asked, "What are you going to live on?" Sebastian smiled and said, "I've actually not thought about it. But I have two hands to work with, haven't I?"

When he had taken leave of them all, he climbed the steep path through the garden. When he came to the falcon's cage, he opened the door. The bird rushed out and unfolded its magnificent wings to soar

skyward. Its ceaseless screams of freedom accompanied Sebastian on the start of his eager journey.

SEBASTIAN'S ROUTE lay northwards, and for forty days he hurried in that direction. He came to know what it was like to sleep on the bare earth at night, and to have the dew of heaven moisten his face in the morning. He slept in abandoned barns out in the fields, where the stars shimmered through the roof. He became acquainted with the wayside shelters whose guests would disappear into the half-light of early morning. He sawed wood, beat carpets, carried coal, and swept the streets, so that he didn't have to beg. As he approached the low country, he would fall at times into the hands of the police, who would question him, lock him up, and then let him go again. He walked the road with workmen, criminals, and soldiers run wild, and illuminated them all with his smiling purity.

As he approached the capital, he roamed through countless neighborhoods, one connected to the next, like so many open sores. Berlin was at the heart of them. He hobbled along the dusty streets with bruised feet, running into streams of people in the ravines between buildings. Everyone was in a hurry and at enmity with everybody else. Misery cast glances of consuming rage at good fortune, which was equated with power, wealth, and possessions. The air Sebastian breathed was both icy and overheated. There were men in uniform standing at every street corner, guns on their hips like animal tamers. They looked with distrust and suspicion at the hordes of lean, pale people who again and again mingled together with no set purpose, then scattered and re-formed, slowly but defiantly.

Toward the center of the city, one plate-glass window followed upon another without a pause. Indeed, these huge windows went all the way to the upper stories, making the buildings into glass boxes in which

men with ruddy complexions sat before bottles of wine and steaming dishes. Jewels lay gleaming wickedly on cushions of dark velvet, silk shone with a magic glow, chains wove garlands of gold, all manner of cakes and delicacies were piled into mountains, elegant and warm fabrics cascaded like streams from high cliffs, and everywhere there was music, played or sung, while outside a continual procession of weary, stained, tattered, and hungry men hurried by.

As the day advanced and before the dangerous time of twilight descended, many hands were busy with a speed born of fear, gathering up the treasures behind the plate-glass windows and hiding them away in steel safes. Metal shutters rolled down, and from time to time deep-chested bulldogs appeared from out the depths of the cellars to patrol the night in pairs. The darker the sky, the faster the steps of the well clad on the streets, and the surer and firmer the steps of those others. Enveloped in clouds of perfume, gaudily painted women minced around in swarms, draped with furs that made them look like wild beasts, clattering ceaselessly in their high-heeled shoes. Cars raced by with screaming, hooting passengers. At times, dark-clad men hurried breathlessly after a fleeing figure, whistles blew shrilly, and individual shots were fired. Weapons and rings, dogs and children, all were offered for sale in whispers. Strife flared, blows resounded. Cripples slid along the sidewalk and begged for alms in whining voices.

This is how Sebastian experienced the city for three days and nights. He was feverish from hunger, weariness, and unspeakable compassion. When sleep finally forced him to lie down on a bench, rough fists were brandished in his face, rudely awakening him. The patrol grabbed his papers, looked them over, and shook their heads. "Move along now, this is no place to sleep."

Sebastian was hungry for God, not bread. He had to rattle at the doors of many churches before he found one he could open. With deep

fervor, he went to the Table of the Lord. When he returned to his place he was as though borne on wings, his soul filled with the sound of bells. But his wretched body failed him. He sank into a deep sleep, until he felt the sexton rousing him to tell him one shouldn't go to sleep in the House of God. "No," Sebastian agreed, "one shouldn't go to sleep!"

His miserable condition sharpened his senses to the delectable sweet-meats displayed behind glass windows. His stare would fasten on a loaf of bread or some fruit, and, like the tentacles of an octopus, could hardly be pried loose. He saw these self-same stares mirrored a thousand times in the eyes of others.

A man struck a shop window with his bare fist, uttering a cry of anger. Sebastian could well understand such an action by a person driven to despair. He saw emaciated women, pregnant and holding a little one in their arms while still other children clutched at their skirts. They stood for a long time, staring dully at the great piles of sausages, the light gone from their eyes. Sebastian went in and asked for food on behalf of the starving people. The owners cursed him and threw him out.

Slowly a deep-going confusion began to transform his whole spirit. The great things he had set out for seemed to pale. He was like a general who stops to look at every maimed soldier while the battle rages around him. He needed to work and sleep and eat in order to regain control of his body.

As he stood outside the Northern Railway Station in the midst of all the tumult, he collected his thoughts and asked God for help. Streams of passengers poured out of the station gates. Outside, old and young men, soldiers with war-medals on their chests, big and little children, were all begging to carry a piece of luggage for a pittance. Some were successful and went off eagerly, bowed beneath their load. The streams of passengers subsided; the starving people looked with annoyance at one another.

Sebastian was a stranger to them, and his appearance left no doubt that he was a competitor. They told him to go away. At this very moment, a traveler approached Sebastian and asked him to carry his luggage. He picked it up and set off, while curses descended upon him, hurting his heart. He was ashamed of himself. "Who are you," he asked himself, "to be given preference over the others?" When he was given his pay, he returned to the station. There he was met with more cursing, and clenched fists were thrust in his face. Sebastian gave his pay to a man standing to one side, saying, "Take it, you've got children." The man grabbed it greedily. Then it was quiet for a long time. Sebastian swayed from weakness.

A soldier pulled a piece of bread out of his pocket and gave it to him. "We are all brothers," he said. "Yes, I thank you, brother!" answered Sebastian.

A light glimmered, grew brighter, and began to cast its glow over the square like the shine of a candle in a cellar.

SEBASTIAN CAME TO KNOW the cold desolate shelters for the homeless and what it was like to look for work, going up the streets and down. He entered offices and workplaces with bounding steps, his clear eyes radiating courage. When he came in, he seemed to bring warmth with him. Since he saw work not as an inescapable and hated yoke under which one had to bow, but as the means to an unbelievably rich life in God, he was different from the defiant and cunning wretches who were also asking for work. And if he was turned down, he would give a smile and thank for the information. Sometimes he was employed to help for a few hours or even a day. He tackled everything with courage and his work was like a song.

ONCE HE CARRIED SACKS from a barge at the Humboldt harbor for three days on end. He lived and slept here and there among all kinds

of rabble. He was regarded as a good-natured fool with whom no one could be angry, and no one could act bestially in his presence.

When he once said that life was like a test that one must undergo, they laughed in his face. Once he tried to intervene in a violent brawl, with the result that a man, foaming with anger, made for him with an open knife. The assailant stumbled, fell, and broke his jaw against the edge of a nearby chair. Sebastian picked up the groaning man in his arms and took him to the hospital. When he heard that the man had a whole tribe of little ones at home, Sebastian went to visit them regularly and took them his pay.

“You embarrass us,” his companions said, smiling awkwardly.

“Only till you become like me,” Sebastian replied.

A YOUNG MAN who had recently joined this crowd was looking for an accomplice to murder his mother, as she had some money. Sebastian put his arm around the distraught man, and in a voice that resounded like the tones of an organ, sang the praises of his mother. The man was wracked with despair. “I don’t know what to live on,” he said, hopelessly.

Sebastian, who was working in a woodshop, went to his employer and suggested that this fellow take his job at the band-saw. Then he went to look for the man’s mother. He found a woman hardened by bitterness. Without telling her of her son’s intentions, he persuaded her to bake a cake and invite her son to come and visit her. Sebastian witnessed the reconciliation between the two.

ABOUT THIS TIME, speakers began appearing who preached hatred of everything and everybody associated with possessions and power. Sebastian gently but firmly drew one of them down from the handcart on which he had been standing, and got up in his place. “Are you going to

abolish the things that oppress you by imposing them on others? What is needed is a change from the bottom up. What is gained if you one day become powerful and rich and the others then hate you for the very same reason?"

He spoke of renewal through love. He left no doubt that he scorned those who did not feel what responsibility their wealth laid upon them. They listened to him as he explained the laws of love according to the Sermon on the Mount, without even uttering the name of God. "All right," they shouted up at him, "just let those rich folks make a start with this love."

"No!" Sebastian replied, "You, yourself have to make a start with your neighbor—that's where you can begin—with your work mates, with your wife, your father and your children. Don't let the others beat you to it."

They dragged him down off the cart and brandished their fists at him. But others came to his defense and said, "He may be a fool, but it would be wonderful if his words could be acted upon. At least you shouldn't beat him."

ALL THIS TOOK PLACE in the district around the Wedding railway station. Sebastian found steady work there with a junk merchant who collected and resold old iron, broken glass, paper, and rags. The big yard was filled with clouds of rust, dust, and evil smells. Bickering women, old and young, and a few down-and-out men worked there. Under the heavy blows of iron hammers glass was ground fine, lead waste rattled, and sections of cast iron clattered as they broke into pieces. Lean, sore-ridden horses stood listlessly with heads hanging, and only stirred reluctantly when they were kicked or beaten with a whip. Audacious obscenities sprang up like poisonous creepers, forming a rank growth under which one almost suffocated. Beneath it, people paired off shamelessly, like beasts.

The cloud of prayer surrounding Sebastian hovered over it all like a purifying element. He didn't utter a word, and yet it seemed to the people there as if he spoke ceaselessly and most penetratingly. His mere presence irritated and soothed at one and the same time. Mouths that had opened to spit out some obscenity suddenly clamped shut without uttering a word. Hands raised for some horrible deed were lowered, or closed into clenched fists. A woman shouted to Sebastian, "You clear off! No one can enjoy themselves when you're around."

"Oh," he said with a mysterious smile, "I am everywhere." A workman said to him, "Come and have a gin with me!" "Why not?" Sebastian said, "As long as you will drink this cup of water with me." They exchanged drinks. Sebastian uttered a short, fervent prayer to overcome his feeling of disgust. Then he couldn't help coughing in a ridiculous manner.

His companion commented, "Your water tasted flat and insipid." Later, he went to the faucet, drank, and came back to Sebastian. "Listen," he said, "you put something in your cup of water. After drinking it, I had such a warm feeling in my stomach, or in my heart, I don't know where. But this stuff from the faucet, why, it's just plain water."

Sebastian gave him a loving look and said, "You should always drink from my cup."

The workman lowered his gaze and asked, "What sort of a person are you, then?"

"Me?" Sebastian laughed. "I am a workman who wants to be worthy of his pay, like you."

A YOUNG WOMAN, whose voluptuous body showed seductively through many holes in her ragged dress, had cut herself on splinters of glass. One day she was sitting on a bale, groaning and showing the festering boil on her foot. She thought her employer would hire another worker

in her place if she went to a doctor and had to go to hospital. Sebastian knew that her husband was a heavy drinker and that she had three children to feed. He knelt down, opened the sore, and dressed it with a linen rag. The woman gave him a curious look, and said, "Why are you doing this for me?"

"Wouldn't you do the same for me, or someone else who was suffering?"

"Perhaps I would, from now on," she replied.

CHILDREN CAME TO the place of work too. They were wild and neglected, always hungry and spiteful. Their parents welcomed them with curses and blows. The children retaliated in like manner. The very sight of each other produced mutual irritation. Afterwards, they were exhausted, and looked around with the dull gaze of beasts. One day, Sebastian called the children together and, since it was during the work-break, he gave them a handful of buttons he'd found among the rags, did somersaults over the rags with the exulting children, and then gave them some of his bread to eat, and a piece of fish-cake too.

Some of the mothers told him they could feed their own children without his help.

"Really?" he said, and looked them straight in the face. "You've always acted as if you would not grant them a crust of bread."

The women said they'd always given the children whatever they could manage.

"Well then," Sebastian said, "you can keep all the cursing to yourselves."

The women answered that the children were a cheeky lot, and you wouldn't get far with them, unless you knew how to handle them.

"Don't you think," he replied with a twinkle in his eyes, "you've been in this world long enough to really know how to manage them by now?"

The others said he was a schoolmaster in disguise, but they said it without any ill feeling.

ONE DAY AS HE HELD a child on his lap, he noticed that the child's hair was swarming with lice. He called over one of the older boys and gave him some money to buy medicine for treating vermin. The gang of children moved away, whispering to each other, but no one came back. The women and men who had observed the incident told others, and they all laughed uproariously and maliciously. Next day, when the children appeared, they gathered shyly around Sebastian. He said nothing, but went on working. After a long time, the boy standing next to him said, "It's a shame, all that good money going to waste."

A workman called out, "You get used to the bugs in time. In the end you come to feel they are part of you."

Sebastian pulled out a bottle of ointment and applied it as he felt necessary, repeating it as often as possible. The children complained, "It makes us feel quite light-headed."

"Like a new person," Sebastian added. "Oh, we people are plagued by all sorts of vermin, also the kind you cannot see. Sure, you get used to them and think, that's how it has to be. But once you get rid of them, you feel relieved and new."

"Your words have some special meaning," one of them said. "What are you trying to say to us?"

Sebastian's reply was, "My hour has not yet come."

SOMETIMES, WHEN the day's work was over, he would go back and join his former companions. They had not forgotten him. Legends had been woven around his actions. He sat with them at greasy tables, a glass of stale beer in front of him. Stinking tobacco smoke hung over them, like incense around the image of a saint. They recalled the petty

and bitter incidents of their day. Sebastian pointed to a deeper meaning in it all. They hardly understood him, and yet it seemed as if something stirred where before everything had been dead. The eyes of men's souls were not opened, but at least their eyelids quivered from time to time.

One day, Sebastian saw again the young man who had wanted to kill his mother. When he recognized Sebastian in the street, he disappeared into the crowd in order to hide his burning shame. Sebastian rejoiced in his heart at this. Yet quite often, deep discouragement threatened to suffocate him, like a dense fog that made it difficult to breathe. He went through the streets with a burning thirst to find help.

Just in that district, he came across a gray church under the patronage of Saint Sebastian. He welcomed this discovery and took it as a sign from God. He came to this church every morning at dawn. There was a statue of the saint, bound to a pillar, the victim of his tormentors' arrows. The priest of the church, when he learned about Sebastian's life, got up early every day so as not to deprive him of spiritual nourishment. Nevertheless, he shook his head.

Light began to radiate from Sebastian ever more strongly. His soul, filled utterly by God, seemed to stream out of every pore of his flesh and surround him like a halo.

AFTER SEBASTIAN HAD SPENT nights here and there, and even on the bales of rags at his place of work, the young woman whose foot he had treated told him he could sleep at her apartment. She had been watching Sebastian with covetous eyes for a long time, and she thought that once she had him in her house, she would quickly attain her goal.

Sebastian went with her. The two rooms were neglected, and the filth overflowed through the broken windows. It was an act of heroism even to enter the kitchen. Fingers stuck to whatever they touched. Sebastian slept on a pallet of straw on the ground.

The ceiling leaked water and dampness from the rooms above trickled down the side of the wall where the straw pallet lay. It seeped through and made patches above him that flowed into each other. A dark streak a hands-breath wide stretched downwards. In the upper half, a crack in the wall, likewise dark in color from the damp, divided it horizontally. Sebastian saw this form of a cross—which seemed to hang from the clouds—when his eyes closed at night and again when he opened them in the morning. He prayed, “I greet Thee, O Cross, one and only Hope.”

The tenement in Wedding where Sebastian lived enclosed a damp yard within its four huge wings. In the middle of the yard stood a single lamp-post. Six rows of windows, one above the other, spewed out unceasing noise—shouting, shrieks, weeping, and sing-song. It quieted down for barely a few hours at night. More than four hundred human beings occupied this prison. The yard was like a muck-heap, crawling with worms and larvae. School boys helped criminals hide their ill-gotten gains or convert them into cash. Candidates for confirmation went in and out side by side with prostitutes. A stench arose from this sea of corruption. One inhaled it with every breath.

The woman told Sebastian about her husband, how he didn’t give her any money and only appeared after long intervals, filled fit to bursting with lust and brutality, to take his wife and beat the children. She wept about it all, and at the same time said she would smash his skull in.

Sebastian saw no point in asking her whether she had done everything possible to help her husband out of this manner of living and to better ways. People lived here under the heel of a fate they could not understand. A wolf caught in a steel trap tears at his own flesh to get free; the human being sets upon his neighbor. The hatred one bore another could scarcely be unraveled. Right could not be differentiated from wrong.

So Sebastian took the children to heart and breathed his breath into them. He made them merry, and he taught them. The potatoes destined for the pot were first decked out and made into comical figures. The children went to sleep bedded down around him. Their mother continued to pin her hopes on Sebastian. This fact, and the increasing cleanliness of her children, made her look after herself better.

One day, while she was out, Sebastian did a grand clean-up. He glued the broken chairs and mended the wobbly table. The broken window frames were fixed, the window panes cleaned, and strips of muslin hung for curtains. When she entered, the woman pushed herself forward, her eyes shining as she reached for Sebastian's shoulders and tried to kiss him.

But he said in a loud voice, "Look at me, Sister!" When she looked up she was shocked by the radiance of his face and the unfathomable, pained earnestness that came from him. Sebastian touched her forehead with his lips. She almost broke down. The spot on her brow burned and seemed to sear into her brain like a flame.

"What kind of a man are you?" she murmured, "I would like to live with you like this forever."

"You will," Sebastian replied, "You will live with me forever. Do not believe the nonsense your physical senses dangle before you. Can't you hear a soft melody that penetrates all that chatter? That is your soul beginning to sing."

"Nonsense!" the woman burst out. "You just don't want me!"

"I want you and many others! Or rather, Another wants you all through me!"

"Fool!" she replied, and turned her back on him, but it was not really herself that said this.

From then on she went about lost in thought, head bent, unnamed feelings stirring within her. One night her husband came in, treading

heavily and roaring like a bull. Sebastian lit the lamp. The man stood there, looking around uncertainly. He was like a foreign element in the clean room. Who was that haggard man in the corner? You couldn't look at him without feeling uncomfortable. The children began to whimper and finally to cry.

"Are those my young ragamuffins?" he called, relieved. "What's going on here? And you," he growled at Sebastian with an obscene curse, "what are you doing here?"

His wife came out of the next room and said in a gentle but firm voice, "Don't touch him, he is a saint."

Her husband made a threatening move towards Sebastian while a stream of abuse poured from his lips. Sebastian gave the astonished man an extraordinarily powerful embrace and led him to a chair. Then he told him how he had come to this place.

The wife said, "I'll make you a cup of coffee. If you're hungry, I can fry up some potatoes."

She went into the kitchen. Her husband couldn't cope with his feelings. Sebastian fetched the children. They came, clean and trusting, but they held onto Sebastian's coat with one hand.

"You have good children, brother," he said softly, "get to know them properly. Children, you have a good father, get to know him too!"

The man was silent. Suddenly he burst out fiercely, "It's a dog's life!" He looked around with a strange, distracted gaze, clutched his head, leapt up, and staggered hastily out of the door.

Sebastian went into the kitchen and told the woman with a smile that she should postpone the celebration to another day, but that day would surely come. The woman began to weep and kissed his hand.

The day came very soon. The husband appeared, almost sober and freshly shaven. Embarrassed, he set a packet on the table and said he hadn't much time, he only wanted to say hello. He'd just earned some

money and his wife should look after it. She drew his head to her breast. At this Sebastian left the room and sent the children out for some beer. As he was washing the potatoes, the couple came up to Sebastian. The husband shook his hand and said he should leave that job to him.

ONE EVENING, as Sebastian came off the street into the entrance hall of the building, he saw a fourteen-year-old girl surrounded by several women. She was showing off with a flashlight her new bright yellow boots as well as flimsy stockings with a silky sheen. The light also lit up the stained and torn hem of her dress. The women were full of envy and admiration for the wonderful stockings and shoes, and one of them—the girl’s mother—boasted that all of this was a gift from a certain engineer. Whereupon, the child laughed.

Sebastian hurried off, cast himself on his knees before the Cross on his wall and prayed, ringing his hands. Then he visited the child’s mother, who lived in another wing of the building. He learned that a man, an engineer, had said he was ready to keep the child and had offered a gift of two hundred marks. The woman’s face was ravaged and battered by the claws and fists of her need. She spoke in a toneless, indifferent voice. But she was satisfied with the change in her daughter’s lot. She said her husband had fallen somewhere in the war and she had four more children to care for.

Sebastian knew that words would be of no avail here. He asked why she would give her child away for a mess of pottage. As for him, he was ready to take the child on and give her five hundred marks in addition. The woman’s eyes lit up, and the corners of her mouth twitched, spider-like, as she gave him a lewd smile.

She asked him whether he had so much money, and Sebastian said she might think, and rightly so, that he himself possessed nothing, but he was the agent of a very rich, great, and noble lord.

All right, the mother agreed, this lord should have the girl.

The very same evening Sebastian went out into the streets of the city. His eyes were like two eternal lamps shining through all the darkness. He came into the districts where there were wide streets, hotels, and theaters. A car stopped as a couple hailed it. The man gave an address, and the driver said, "Three hundred marks," whereupon the gentleman pulled a handful of bills from his pocket and carelessly handed over the desired sum. The car roared off.

Sebastian turned around. Behind him some windows shimmered, bathed in orange-colored light. The door the couple had just come through gleamed in its ornamental metal fittings. Without thinking twice, Sebastian took hold of the door, swung it open, and quickly lifted the heavy curtain.

Someone was playing exaggeratedly soulful music. There was a penetrating odor of skin, clothing, tobacco, and alcohol. Sebastian took off his hat, went up to a half-drunk gentleman who was sitting between two girls, and said, "Brother, you've drunk enough already. Every further gulp you take will be sheer torment for you to swallow. It won't make any difference to you if you drink half a bottle less and give me the money. A child has to be ransomed. Now that I've told you, you will be co-guilty of a crime worse than murder if you don't help me. From now on you will have a fire in your soul which not even a deluge of wine will be able to quench."

The young man pressed against the arm of his upholstered chair and tried to speak, but only stammered, "What...what..." For the power proceeding from Sebastian's gaze forced him to lower his eyes. His mouth opened and closed without uttering a sound. His hand glided into his pocket as though compelled, drew out some money and put it on the table. Sebastian took it.

One of the girls wanted to laugh, but at the same moment her hidden self rose to the surface and said in a quiet and friendly voice, "What kind of child is this?"

Sebastian told them. The girl was silent, then looked for a bill in her handbag. "It is unclean money," she murmured.

"Not at all," Sebastian replied, "It is so clean, I could kiss it for joy!" And he did so.

A man in uniform came and showed him the door. Sebastian smiled, and left straight away.

Throughout the night he continued to work in the vineyard. He was often scornfully laughed at. Once a policeman asked what he was up to, but a waiter and a street-girl took his part. The policeman gazed after him for a long time, shaking his head.

Five hundred marks was a lot of money. Sebastian knew it would be no easy task to collect such a sum. During the day he worked in the rag-and-bones warehouse and every evening he went out into the vineyard. After three nights he was still short of nearly half the amount. He was standing at a corner late that night as the streets grew quieter. A girl went past him and looked at him first seductively, then with embarrassment. She went on her way, then turned around and asked what he was waiting for.

"Perhaps for you," Sebastian replied, and spoke about his need.

The girl looked into his eyes with a burning gaze. Her voice, grown hoarse from shrieking, was gentle and sweet as she told him to come to this place at the same hour the following night.

Sebastian did so. A little company of girls was standing silently to one side, as the one he knew stepped up to him and gave him the needed sum.

"Who are you?" she said.

"I want to be a Christian."

“Do you pray?”

“For you and your sisters.”

“Do that for us!”

Two men came running up to Sebastian. The girls cried out and two of them ran off.

“You’re giving the money to him?” one of them cried, and tried to take hold of Sebastian. But he, suddenly endowed with superhuman strength, seized the angry man’s hand and held onto it, smiling all the while as if asking for forgiveness. The other fellow ran up and struck a blow with his clenched fist. It landed on his companion, who groaned. Sebastian felt that God did not want him to stand idly by, and so he set to work. The youths retreated before the onslaught of his lean arms, which had become as strong as steel. He said in a loud voice, “I know very well that to your way of thinking I am doing something very wicked by saving a child that is hanging by a thread over the abyss of depravity. But since God has commanded me, you must withdraw. Since He is with me, I am stronger than you are. Go then, and think about what you have just experienced!”

His uplifted head rose like a beacon out of the darkness, his raised arms were like white pinions. Was he not surrounded by light? The young men breathed fast, and stood watching, hesitant. Finally, the one growled, “He’s a fool!” and went. His companion followed him.

Sebastian walked quickly. He felt like a hymn of praise, soaring upward and resounding. The girl followed him like a filing drawn by a magnet. When Sebastian shut the door of the house, she remained outside, clutching the grubby doorknob, feeling herself of less worth than an empty sack.

Next morning, Sebastian bought the child from her mother. She received the money with a coarse laugh and hastily hid it under her apron. A good woman living in one of the side streets had a cellar where

she kept the vegetables she sold. Sebastian brought the child there for the time being. Just as he was climbing the stairs to his room, the child's mother appeared, and with a shrill yell demanded to know where he had taken her daughter.

"You've got your money," he replied. She threw the screw of paper bills at his feet and screeched, "I don't want the money! I want to find the man who's taken my child. I'll smash his windows for him."

"Now," Sebastian said, taking her hands in his, "keep your money all the same. But rest assured, your child is under the protection of God, and if you want to go to her, I will gladly take you."

AS TIME PASSED, people came quite often to Sebastian saying, "Tell me, what should I do?" Sebastian occupied himself in a loving way with ravaged souls, shattered hearts, horrible deformities, open sores, and broken spines as well as wooden horses with missing legs, headless dolls, wobbly chairs, and broken dishes, for word went around that he could do everything. Finally, those who were physically sick came and experienced relief in his presence. But Sebastian could see behind the crowds that pressed around him other and greater multitudes whose limits could not be seen, and this tormented and oppressed him. He often despaired, and his soul grew dark. Whereas formerly he had had a feeling of invincible strength and had believed he would never collapse under the weight the world laid upon him, he now felt how he wavered, oppressed by an indescribable burden. He dragged himself before God and cried out, "Help me!"

In spite of all this, he continued to go around as before, but the joy that used to drive him was no longer there. One morning as he came out of church, strengthened only a little by the Body of Christ in the Mass and feeling immeasurably sad, he was touched on the shoulder from behind and saw the young man who had once wanted to kill his mother. The man looked at him without saying a word. But when

Sebastian asked him what he wanted, he got this answer: "I have been following your life for a long time, and I know where you have just come from. Is it really true that your Christianity gives you the strength to be like you are?"

"Strength?" thought Sebastian, "Strength? Do I really still have any strength?" But even as he was asking himself this question, Sebastian felt with awe how strength was kindled anew within him, and the more he looked at the one before him, the more it seemed that the strength he felt flowed powerfully from the man's eyes into him. They spoke together for a long time, mysteriously subdued as they went off to their place of work. The mass of people seemed to bear them along, as the sea carries ships with priceless cargoes. At last the younger man spoke, "I have changed my life completely. If I am not too unworthy, let me be your helper!"

From then on they slept side-by-side, Sebastian and Paul. As they slept, a broad stream of light from heaven flooded their little room. It was the breath of God, which nourished them.

ONE EVENING, icy clouds of strange darkness began to descend upon the town. Shortly before nightfall, a despondent sun made its appearance and bathed the sky in a dull red, like blood in a dish of dirty water. The masses began to seethe. In the yards, on the streets, in the bars and abandoned beer-gardens, the suppressed cries of all those who felt trapped by life began to rumble. Workers who were considered nothing more than a hand or foot, the jobless who were no longer allowed to be even hand or foot, street-girls burned out in the frigid glow of giving themselves away for money, mothers everlastingly pursued by their ravenous, starving children, soldiers reduced to instruments of murder by a long war, invalids torn and poorly patched up, all groaning beneath the yoke of the more powerful—now they wanted to see

whether this yoke which ground them into the dust could be lifted and thrown off by force.

Lost like a dove as he bore his message of love, Sebastian flew above the foaming, relentless breakers of the flood. He was completely alone. Perhaps the other doves were seeking shelter from the storm in caves. The roaring of the elements confused and bewildered him too. These storms of primeval hatred raging against each other threw him around like a butterfly. Compassion drew him downward, fire leapt up and burned his wings; he tumbled and fell. He stood on a table, clenching his fists around invisible swords, and thundered curses.

“Woe to those who dance, while others crawl! Woe to those who gorge themselves, while others go hungry! Woe to those who lounge in silks, while others wrap themselves in rags! Woe to those who get drunk, sucking the blood from living hearts! Woe to those who glide by in silent limousines and do not heed the tapping of crutches! Woe to those who command and do not obey God! Woe to those who chain men with need so that they are forced to work! Woe to those who do not take souls into account but only muscles and bellies! Woe to the rich! Woe to the mighty! Woe to the hard-hearted! You will be laid low by your own weapons and tormented by the very laws you have invented! The machines are rising in mutiny; muscles and bellies are in revolt! They have no heart, no soul—you wanted it so! The mills of God are turning, He will crush you!”

The storm broke, the cries of his listeners crashed like the striking of thunder and lightning. Sebastian stood in the midst of a sea of fire. He fled to an open space and groaned, “What have I done?”

Satan, standing close by, whispered into his ear, “You’ve done the right thing! Go back and tell them more!”

Christ stood in a haze, far off. Sebastian tore himself away and ran towards him. He ran for hours, panting, but could not reach Him.

A cat was being chased by a howling mob of youths. Streaming with blood, its fur torn, it leapt at his breast. He hid it under his coat. Christ looked at him through the eyes of the creature. "Lord," Sebastian stammered, "I understand Thee."

A man was waiting for him at his door. Sebastian noticed Satan looking over this man's shoulder and telling him to say the following: "The world must be renewed. If we stand together, we'll make it into a paradise where it will be glorious to be alive. But first we must tear down the men who lord it over us."

"Brother," Sebastian replied, "You yourself must be renewed. If you live in God and for God, it will be all the same to you whether you work for three hours or for ten. If everyone was like that, then the world would indeed be a paradise in which it would be glorious to be alive."

The man said scornfully, "You have no compassion, and neither does your God."

Sebastian put his hand on the man's shoulder and said, "God went through all humiliation as a man, through unheard of torment and suffering. He has lived an example of compassion before you. If He overcame the world, then you can too. Only one thing is necessary. What's the world to you, if you have God?"

Satan hid behind the man and went off with lowered head. A mob coming towards him swallowed him up with a roar. Windowpanes were shattered and the rabble pounced on some bread, treading it into the dirt. They seized scraps of meat, which they also trampled. As soon as one snatched a crust, his neighbor grabbed hold of him. They were no longer driven by hunger, but by greed, the desire to have and possess something.

Gin, flowing from broken barrels, was like fuel to the fire. Soldiers ran past, shots rang out, a machine-gun dealt out death in a business-like way, cries shattered the air, and curses were hurled back and forth

like showers of arrows. An army officer was seized by a crazed mob and thrown to the ground. Boots pounded his body. Sebastian ran, overturned the machine-gun, pulled the officer to his feet and dragged him to a house. The officer cursed once more, "You dogs!" and died. Hate, only hate. Hate as daily bread, hate as the very air one breathed, heart, brain, and soul. Hate, only hate.

Sebastian fled to his room, flung his arms around Paul and stammered, "Hate, nothing but hate! Beloved brother, how great must be our love to overcome this hate! How many must there be of those who love, until everyone who hates has a man of love at his side to embrace him!"

There was a knock at the door and a young priest came in. He said that he scorned the prospects of an official post and an inheritance due to him. "With everything I am and have, I put myself completely at your disposal, if you will only not send me away."

"Brother," Sebastian said, "what do you know about me?"

"A call goes out from you," said the young priest, "like the sound of a trumpet calling to battle."

Sebastian said, "Your clothing is of fine material. Put on a simple smock. Your hands are soft and white. Find work that will make them rough! You should not appear better than those you love. If you are willing to sacrifice yourself completely, then, in the name of Christ, you are welcome!"

At the bottom of the house they found a storage cellar that had been plundered. There, Sebastian gathered in at night all who held to him. This catacomb was poorly lit by an oil lamp, but God himself stood in their midst and shone like the burning sun.

Sebastian taught. He opened the door to a new world. Whoever looked upon it lamented his past life.

"Will it be possible for men to enter this new world?" they asked.

“It depends on you,” was Sebastian’s reply. “Don’t look at others, or at me, but see to yourself. Don’t desire this or that, but God alone. Don’t expect love from others, even if they are your neighbors; only take care that you yourself love!”

He urged Paul and his other helper, Bernhard, to leave him and live somewhere or other, as he did. He gave them neither orders nor rules, but they were to meet once a week to keep in touch.

A priest came to Sebastian and told him, “You are going on a false path.” Sebastian remained silent. “The Church,” continued the priest, “will look on you with mistrust.”

“As far as that goes,” Sebastian answered, “that is only right. We are the spearhead of a new age, and we storm ahead. One day, after a long time, you will catch up with us, bringing your blessing in your hand.”

“Take care,” the priest warned him as he departed, “take care lest you fall into the sin of arrogance!”

Sebastian threw himself down before the priest and said, “Lay your hands upon me!”

The old man turned back, confounded, and murmured, “How can I lay my hands upon you?”

“I beg of you, in all humility.”

“If I were only younger, I would go with you,” the priest said. And he blessed Sebastian with trembling hands.

AS SEBASTIAN RETURNED home in the darkness from his place of work, he saw a girl sitting on the steps. He recognized her as the one to whom he owed thanks for taking up a collection on behalf of the endangered child. He asked her what she wanted. The girl wept bitterly and replied, “Choose other paths and find a different place to stay, I beg of you. There are two men who are lying in wait to avenge themselves on you.”

“Oh, dear sister,” Sebastian said, “if God wanted me to be killed, I could flee to the ends of the earth and it would be in vain. But if He does not will it so, then I will pass unharmed through a multitude of murderers.”

The girl looked at him passionately and murmured, “You! Fancy there being a man like you! I stand alone in the darkness. I don’t know where I am anymore.”

“It seems to me you are close to the Kingdom of Heaven,” Sebastian said.

She shook her head. “I can’t live anymore without you. I have followed you daily, as one who has lost the way follows the light.”

Sebastian took her to the mother of the child he had protected, now a changed woman. He told her to live with this mother and child.

The girl kissed the child eagerly and whispered in her ear, “Do you love Sebastian?”

“Yes,” the child answered, “with all my heart.”

BERNHARD’S WEALTH made it possible to set up a kitchen in the basement, so that those in need could eat there. Some came who didn’t really need to, and there was grumbling among Sebastian’s followers. Sebastian smiled and then said, “How short-sighted you are! Do you want to be like the children of the world, clever and prudent? Let us give out of compassion!”

He gave work to the girl, whom they called Agnes, and to some of her sisters as well.

One of them disappeared after a time and failed to return. Sebastian learned that a consuming passion for a man had driven her away, but that she already wished to return, only didn’t have the courage. So he went out at night to find her. She wouldn’t look him straight in the eyes, and all she said was, “I am bad.”

“But come!” Sebastian replied.

“Am I not a great sinner?” she asked.

“Am I your judge?” he asked in reply, and again begged her to return. “Just come!”

Then she went with him.

Some people reported that others among his followers were hypocrites who did not believe in the God he proclaimed.

“Oh,” Sebastian said, “then our love must burn more brightly. Our whole being must be more fiery, our deeds more selfless, so that they will believe in God! It is not their fault, it is ours!”

One day Paul and Bernhard prayed with him. Their bodies became light as silk, and their souls shone through in a mysterious way. Later, Bernhard announced that the bank in which he kept his savings had crashed, and the community was now as poor as ever.

“You’re wrong,” Sebastian said, “we’re richer than ever before. Thanks be to God that He puts obstacles in our way. Otherwise we would have grown arrogant.”

“Won’t many fall away from you now?” the brothers asked.

But Sebastian said he didn’t think that a whole sea of soup could sweep a man into the Kingdom of God. Souls needed food more than bodies.

When the kitchen closed, there was rioting. A mob broke into the cellar and began plundering. Sebastian went to them and said, “That’s right! It’s all yours. Take it then!”

Suddenly they didn’t want to anymore, and they hesitated. He picked up dishes and handed them out. “Here! Here! Take it, I beg of you!”

They stood there awkwardly; some slipped off with their booty, others threw it down. Some of the women of the neighborhood said they could make use of a pot, a table, or a chair, as after all they lived nearby.

“You see,” Sebastian said to his faithful followers, “how people hang onto a pot or some utensil, and it is more important to them than the Kingdom of Heaven! They still have a long way to go.”

Some of the girls looked for work. Others went from one street corner to another in the dark. Sebastian continued to greet them with a handshake and a good word as before. “You are making detours,” he said, “but the longer the journey, the more wonderful the homecoming. I have lit a torch for you, and it will continue to burn.”

ONE NIGHT THERE was a knock at his door. Two young men were standing there. They asked if he recognized them. They were Johannes and Ansgar, two brothers from the monastery. Sebastian embraced them warmly, and asked them what they wanted.

“Our desire,” they said, “is to serve you. Your call got through even to us. We set out in haste to seek you, and at last we have found you.”

Sebastian could not restrain his tears and said, “From where does so much grace come to me? I am not worthy that God shows me so much goodness.”

A star had descended softly on Wedding and drew other stars irresistibly after it, including some which had almost burned out. Even stones, remembering they were once stars, began to glimmer again.

A MAN WITH CROOKED limbs, who had lain a long time in an unlit room and who cried out whenever someone touched him, longed passionately to breathe fresh air. When mild and sunny winter days came, Sebastian and Paul bore him up, as if in angels’ arms, onto the rooftop and covered him warmly. The old man, who’d lain forgotten in that hole of a cellar as if in a grave, now had his bed made fresh each day. Ansgar built a platform on wheels for a crippled child who couldn’t walk, so he could roll across the floor. The daughter of one family, who

had attempted suicide and since then had been shy of showing herself among people, was led into the open on the arm of Johannes, who acted to her like a gentleman. Children learned to sing and dance in empty building lots. Every day a new harvest of good deeds grew.

Some of their following were out of work. These people came to Sebastian and said, "What's to become of us?" He laughed and said they shouldn't worry unnecessarily, three families could easily feed a fourth. This the families did willingly and need fled, hiding its face in shame.

Sebastian's employer, an embittered bachelor, sought his acquaintance and once donated a sum of money without uttering a word. The daughter of Sebastian's landlord came, saying she wanted to see this remarkable saint just out of curiosity. She went away with burning cheeks and restless eyes to return from time to time to work together with former street-girls who lacked a mother. The living carried their heads higher. The dying passed on with a smile on their lips.

ONE DAY A MAN came up to Sebastian. He pulled out a notebook and said he had been sent by a newspaper, and would Sebastian please tell him what he was actually trying to do. Sebastian smiled, and said nothing. The man talked at him, twenty to a dozen. Suddenly he stopped and stared at Sebastian. At last he pulled himself together again and said, all right then, he'd ask some questions, and would Sebastian be so good as to answer him? For example, how would he solve the social question? What was his attitude to school reform? To combating sexual diseases? What form of government did he think best? Would he give free rein to the most able among the population? What was his attitude to land reform? To unwed mothers? Did he approve of strikes?

Sebastian was silent. The man began to feel uncomfortable. Sebastian took pity on him and said, "The answer to all these questions has been given by Another, when He said, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

“But surely, you can’t solve the whole enormous maze of questions with such a statement?”

“Oh, yes,” Sebastian replied, “this whole enormous maze of questions could only be built up because these words were not followed. You ought to think that over very seriously.”

The man asked Sebastian if he really thought everyone would obey this command.

“What is that to me,” Sebastian replied, “as long as I obey it myself?”

The man left, shaking his head.

A newspaper printed a sensational report of this conversation. Photographers came chasing after Sebastian, and since they couldn’t reach him, they collected a crowd of loafers and took pictures of them gathered threateningly around the entrance to the catacomb.

A CAR DROVE UP. An elegant gentleman wanted Sebastian to present an esoteric doctrine for the educated elite, and invited him to give a talk at afternoon tea. Sebastian answered that there are not two varieties of the gospel—all the education in the world could not invent anything higher than the uniting of man with God in the sacraments.

A YOUNG MAN dressed completely in flaming red threatened Sebastian, saying that his way of going about things hindered the onward march of the masses towards happiness on earth. His activity could not be tolerated much longer; the day of reckoning was near.

Sebastian answered that he wanted to give the highest joy and all happiness the earth could impart to all people. “But you, Brother,” he went on, “are too modest and desire too little. I want to fill men with such a longing for happiness that they will arise most gloriously and be mysteriously united with God. They will smile at life’s miseries and they will go on their way, dancing.”

“Yes,” the man shouted, and his voice was choked with rage, “all this babbling about God.”

Sebastian grew sad and said, “It has to be that the Anti-Christ seeks to lord it over God.”

“Yes,” the man replied, “look out then, you and your God! The Anti-Christ has sharp and lethal weapons. Your babbling will only stop when you lie stretched out dead on the ground!”

Sebastian smiled and said softly, “So long as I am alive, my influence is limited. Once I am dead, I’ll be much more dangerous.”

HIS FOLLOWERS noticed Sebastian wasting away, like a drop of water being absorbed by the heat of the sun. They begged him to give up his work. He asked them whether they didn’t want him as their leader anymore. “Well, then,” he cried, when they assured him, “I have come to show that life can be made holy, all work and everything one does. I wish I was mute. Then only deeds would be left to speak. I saw a little baby lying in a carriage. A man went past and brushed away the flies. Truly, this small deed was more than all the talk and shouting in halls and meeting rooms. If someone asks you, ‘Where is God?’ say, ‘Here!’ and do a good deed.”

Johannes, Ansgar, Bernhard, and Paul were all active. Everyone gathered around Sebastian, like a brood of chicks around the mother hen. Sebastian embraced those who gathered around him with an unfathomable smile. One day the night watchman from a factory came and told Sebastian he had seen the shining form of a man hovering silently over Wedding, and although it was all very distant and unclear, he had recognized him as Sebastian. Sebastian was deeply shocked and asked him not to say a word. But the man had already told others and many climbed onto the rooftops at night to see the phenomenon. Some came down shaken, and swore that the night watchman had reported

correctly. Others just shrugged their shoulders. A transport of happiness gripped the people. The streets seemed to become quieter, and footsteps softer.

A young girl, crippled and almost completely lame, tried to crawl up a flight of steps, as she often did. Sebastian was coming down from the top. The girl suddenly cried out. She stood up uncertainly, but very quickly, and cast herself down at his feet. At times a doctor departed from a sickbed with an inscrutable expression on his face. Sebastian would come, pouring forth strength like a fiery breath. The sick ones sighed deeply, then roused themselves to face life anew. "God, oh my God," Sebastian would pray, "do not treat your simple servant thus!"

The voice of God thundered powerfully in his ear, "Sebastian, my servant, would you oppose my will?"

IN THE CITY, life grew bitterer than ever before. Work and bread vanished. People stormed through the streets like huge breakers against the cliff-like corners of the houses on whose crests men rode, calling to violence, looting, and murder.

Sebastian's followers lived together as one big family, where all could eat as long as some were earning. They were threatened and insulted from all sides. Unfortunately, even some among them were there solely for their own advantage.

One night a man who was disturbed in his mind came into the catacomb. He went staggering through the gathering to Sebastian, dropped a few wretched bills of money at his feet as if they were something unclean, and murmured, "It is impossible to eat when others go hungry. The last two hours I've been wandering around, standing in a fever in front of stores and restaurants. I simply couldn't swallow a single glass of beer. My throat closed up more tightly than a clenched fist. Take the money I kept back, I beg of you."

Those gathered there, stretching out as far as into the yard, were dumbstruck. Two or three broke away from the others, letting money fall from their hands. They sank to the ground in front of Sebastian, who embraced them and drew them close to his heart. A song broke loose from a choked throat, tears trickling over the melody. It shook off all bonds, like a sea-eagle climbing powerfully upward. From the depths of the catacomb, from the stinking abyss of that yard, there resounded the song, "Great God, we praise Thee!"

It bore away on its jubilant wings the curses that were hurled from the windows. A mob poured in from the street. Stones flew, clubs were swung menacingly, and some shots were fired, aimed at Sebastian.

He went out into the yard, which immediately seemed to grow bright at his coming. He stretched out his hands, and said, "Is it me you are looking for? Can't you see I am unarmed? Take me then."

It became very quiet. The attackers looked around and didn't know what to do. Suddenly a harsh voice screamed, "We'll get you soon enough and trample you under our feet! Don't worry, we won't forget you!"

Sebastian stepped forward two paces and cried out, "That hour will come when God wills it. You and I are only instruments." The people ran off. Sebastian spent the rest of the night in prayer.

Sebastian had not yet celebrated the Holy Sacrifice with his followers. Agnes, the young girl who had helped him save the child, approached him excitedly and begged him to save himself by leaving the city or moving into a quiet quarter. She said his enemies' threats were only growing. Sebastian put his hand on her shoulder, and spoke. "Everything must be fulfilled here where we are. But tell those who are afraid to go where they think best. Meanwhile we want first to gather strength together in the arms of God." The next day he gathered them all together in the catacomb, although several were already missing. He said to them, "You have often asked me where my strength came from.

I want to tell you a mystery. Once upon a time, the breath of God flowed easily and unhindered throughout mankind. We have torn the cycle apart in order to be free. Look at this world which is free from God! But those of us who long to find the source of our life anew can do so at every hour, if we so will it, and drink in God's breath, take God into our hearts and enter into Him. Let us wash and cleanse one another so that we do not go unworthily to the Feast of Joy!"

They stayed together that night and waited for the dawn in prayer. As dawn came, Sebastian led them into the church and stood in festive robes before the altar of a side-chapel. The cold air grew warm with the glow of their expectation. The two candles on the altar flared up with mysterious brightness. Arms, legs, and faces, all slowly lost their significance; the eyes of their souls were opened and their bodies were pervaded with a liberating light. Sebastian, standing by the altar, seemed in a miraculous way to fade and dissolve into a sweet and pure brightness. His voice rose, disembodied, ringing clearly. The Host was lifted up like a star, the boundaries of space fell away. The silence was filled with the sound and melody of an intoxicating power and gentleness. God drew them irresistibly, and their souls pressed irresistibly to-wards Him. With a liberating rush each separate being fused into one. They seemed no longer to be this person or that; each was at the same time closer to the others and stranger to the others than ever before.

The people looked at each other with shy glances and smiled secretly and hesitantly. They stood together silently, then went out in silence. Was this the same old world all around them? But it was transformed! The wide-open jaws, the gaping ice-cold stares, the shaking clenched fists—weren't all of these unspeakably ridiculous, like the gestures of idols one no longer fears? Why were people always in such a hurry? Wasn't all this running around ridiculous, because it had no goal? Why were men whispering there, roaring here, screaming somewhere else?

People flowed together and then apart again, like lava, all molten and fiery. Where were they flowing to? Lethal weapons were carried, tanks drove through the streets, brash flags were unfurled. Many voices cried out, "To battle!" What sort of foolish, useless battle was that, which was not waged for the cause of God? Green light from the rapacious eyes of Lucifer, the beast of prey, flooded over them.

The shop windows of big department stores were being smashed. Bales of cloth, boxes, utensils, and dishes were thrown onto the street. Streetcars were upturned and wrecked, charges of explosives were ignited inside the banks. Screaming mobs ran around, arms full of banknotes, defending their loot with biting and kicking. Barricades were erected from the ruins. Women in tattered blouses danced on top, kicking their legs in the air. Men staggered around, scooping up wine from opened barrels with their hats and caps. Factions broke apart for no apparent reason. Hand grenades were hurled back and forth, exploding in the darkness; their victims rolled to the ground, groaning. Two soldiers, riding unsuspectingly on a bread wagon, were cut to pieces with knives. Children danced shrieking on their bodies, while the very dogs fled with embarrassed glances.

Sebastian and his followers struggled back towards the catacomb. They were scattered by the raving hordes. Sebastian told those who were left to hide separately in their own dwellings. But they wanted to remain with him and pressed around him in the cellar, imploring him to let them stay. He prayed in a loud, firm voice that was like a consecrated light burning in a thunderstorm.

The mocking clatter of machine-gun fire rose to a tempest, punctuated by the triumphant beat of cannon shots. From time to time the very house shook as a grenade landed with an ear-splitting scream. "We do not ask to be protected," Sebastian said, raising his eyes. "We do not pray for our lives. We beg God on our knees for the souls of those who

are murdering each other. Oh, may the eyes of the dying not close before they have received a little spark of God's light. Oh, may their souls with their last strength embrace some dim sense of glory! God, draw them to Thyself. Thou dost see, they know not what they do." His followers hung on his words, moving their lips silently with his.

Several mobs swept into the yard, one after the other, all shouting loudly. They were all drunk with hate, rage, and wine. Matted hair stuck out in spiky tufts over their fanatical brows; their voices screamed hoarsely. Shaking and cramped hands aimed rifle barrels at the kneeling people. Crazy women were spitting and shrieking. Two street-girls, who earlier had almost been saved by Sebastian, now took their revenge by hurling stones, bottles, and mud through the cellar windows.

They were all howling like wild animals, and like animals they wanted to sink their teeth into the flesh of those they hated. Their young leader sprang forward, crying, "Now is the time for decision, you Christians! If you love the enslaved and the outcasts, the poor and the wretched as you preach, then join with us! Take a weapon in your hands! The Day of Victory of the People is near! But if your heart belongs to the oppressors..."

"Stop!" Sebastian said, indignantly. "Don't you know that weapons can never make people free? We hate no one, we can only love."

The man leapt forward and struck Sebastian in the face with his fist. "You are a coward, you prophet. Why don't you defend yourself?"

"Don't you think it takes more courage," Sebastian replied, "to stand up to your blows than to defend yourself or fire a gun?"

"I'm here too," a woman screamed, and struck him over the head with a club.

"Are you still full of courage? Still full of courage?" someone else cried, and fell to.

"We want to see how long his courage holds out," a fourth man laughed, and waved a pistol in front of his face. "It's loaded, dear

prophet! Do you still have courage?” He pressed the trigger, and at the shot, Sebastian shook with convulsions. They all roared with laughter. “That’s good, carry on like this! Our prophet will soon beg for mercy.”

“Have mercy on these people here!” Sebastian cried, and spread his arms out over his followers.

“No, you should beg for yourself!” they laughed in chorus.

“To the lamp post with him!” a woman screamed, “Hasn’t he got the same name as that Sebastian who let himself be peppered with arrows? We’ll riddle this fellow with bullets!”

They seized hold of him and dragged him into the yard, where they bound him to a lamp post. His followers were kicked into a corner. They raised their arms imploringly, and wept, but fists silenced them.

Sebastian stood in the light. His gaze was riveted on the scrap of sky that could be seen high above. His clothes were tattered. The raving crowd grew silent at the sight of his pitiful body, so unearthly thin, but full of soul.

“Cowardly dogs.” a street-girl cried, “Are you afraid to go for him?” She wrenched a pistol from the faltering hand of a young man and shot twice. A bullet tore open his thigh. “Why don’t you cry out?” the woman screeched.

The blood made the people crazy. Horror tried to stir in them, but they suppressed it and made themselves drunk with their shouting. Shots echoed, one after another. Someone said, “Have you still got courage? Still? Don’t you beg for mercy?”

“Lord,” cried Sebastian, and his voice rose up as steeply as a startled bird, then sank down slowly and convulsively. “Let my blood be fruitful, Lord, Lord!” His limbs grew weak, and he slumped forward. A shrill laugh rang out, only to hide itself in a labyrinth of constricted cries. A man said, in a dull voice, “Perhaps...perhaps.”

The murderers hung their heads. It seemed as if they wanted to hide their weapons. A numbed silence descended on the yard. Posters started

peeling off the damp walls. The street-girl, who had been lying on the ground, awakened from her stupor and sat up, passing her hand over her face. "Who will help me now?" she whispered like a little child.

The last one to leave the scene growled in embarrassment, "What business is that of ours? See to it yourself!"

Two men were standing there, irresolute and lost in thought. At last they dared to look at each other, nodded, and carefully freed Sebastian's body from the lamppost.

The believers came together out of the corners. The battle on the streets raged more furiously than ever, yet above it all ascended the victorious prayer, "Saint Sebastian, pray for us!" They lifted him up and carried him solemnly like a sign of victory. "Saint Sebastian, pray for us!" Sebastian's blood left a trail on the street, and the two men followed it.

The street-girl sat there, staring at the filth on which the drops of blood bloomed like roses. "I see," she murmured, "I see the seed. I see it sprout. I see it grow. I see it arise a hundred-fold. I hear the rustling of a forest, a forest of people."

Then she whimpered, "Who will help me?"

From the depths of the catacomb arose a powerful cry, "Saint Sebastian, pray for us!"

THE BLOCKED STREAM

Walter Hüssy

Once there was a beautiful valley in the midst of high mountains. From these mountains flowed a river, clear as crystal, which watered the valley and made it fruitful. It was as beautiful as Paradise. A deep peace and harmony lay upon the valley and its people. They lived together joyfully and in great love toward one another. No one kept anything for himself, but everything was shared in thankfulness to the Creator. These people loved God, for their happy hearts knew that God had given them all these good and glorious gifts—indeed, life itself. Work was like play to them, because they were like children and knew how to make merry with dancing, singing, and games.

This pleasant life went on for hundreds of years. No one in the valley was discontented or wished for anything more, nor for anything different. God, their Father, had forbidden them nothing. The people were inspired only by love, and that was the richness of their lives. Only one warning had been handed down to them by a wise old man, a command that God had given to their forefathers. They were never to drill into the mountains around them, nor to tunnel into the earth, lest a great misfortune come upon the whole valley. And in fact, no man in the valley had ever thought of such a thing. Why should they penetrate into the darkness of the earth? It was very pleasant in the glorious sunlight, for the sun did not scorch or burn but sent only warm, gentle rays upon the earth so that men rejoiced in it.

One day a tall, lean man appeared. He was dressed in a black cloak and came from a remote valley. He had fiery, darting eyes, and his whole manner was restless as he roamed around in the valley. The people wondered about his strange way of living alone without brothers and sisters. The oldest ones asked him where he came from and where he was going, and he revealed what he had in mind. He had been told by mysterious spirits that gold and diamonds were to be found in these mountains. But he needed the help and permission of the inhabitants of the valley in order to dig for them. In return, they would receive three quarters of the treasure he found. The people of the valley replied that they did not need the gold as they had plenty of everything. They also remembered the ancient warning that they should not drill into the mountain. Moreover, the people said to the stranger, "If you do not want to live with us as a brother, you can return to where you came from." The secretive man departed, very angry about the ignorance of the people.

Years went by, and the dark stranger came again to the valley. This time he brought some gold and a few diamonds with him. He thought the people would surely change their minds and consent to his plans if they saw the shining gold and the crystal-clear diamonds and if he told them what these would buy.

The simple villagers asked him again if he had come to live with them. He shook his head and repeated his wishes. He showed them the bright gold and the sparkling diamonds. A secret gleam was to be seen in the eyes of some of the young men. Nevertheless, the man had to leave again with nothing accomplished. The people remained steadfast in their refusal, and though he promised them that they could buy other fruitful valleys and whole countries, it availed him nothing.

Another year passed and the strange man appeared again. This time he succeeded in his purpose. Many of the wise old people had died.

Among the young people were some who, throughout the year, had not been able to forget the gold or the diamonds. They had begun to make plans among themselves, and their greed had increased. The persuasive words of the somber man added to their greed so that an ever greater number became dissatisfied; they finally believed that there was something more precious than the joy, love, and fellowship which they possessed. They thought, too, that the misfortune which had been prophesied would not be so bad.

And so they drilled into the nearest mountain. Much gold and many diamonds were brought out. The stranger took his share, and the people of the valley piled up all that was theirs in great storehouses. Several years went by until at last the mountain was extensively undermined in one place and immense layers of loose rock lay on a steep slope.

The day of the catastrophe came suddenly and unexpectedly. The mountainside facing the valley began to slide. Mighty boulders were loosened. They slipped, plunged, rolled, and leaped down into the valley. It was too sudden to think of fleeing. It looked as if the whole valley would be covered and all the people would be destroyed. Then it happened that the whole mountain mass came to a stop very near the big village. The people breathed again. It appeared that, for the time being, the great catastrophe had passed them by.

However, great misfortune did befall. The mountain stream was blocked and the glorious, gushing water no longer flowed into the valley. The land was no longer fruitful. Thistles and thorns grew and increased the hard work. The sun scorched and burned. Peace and harmony left the people. Their hearts were cold, and soon each one cared only about himself, snatching gold and trying to pile up more. There were many who secretly longed for the former life, but although this secret yearning lived on in many hearts, most of the people turned away from God. Discord, dissension, and envy dwelled in their hearts; sin and injustice increased.

There was a young man was growing up in their midst. In his heart was a great and growing longing for the happiness and peace which had once ruled in that valley. He searched a great deal in the old writings and led a very devout and quiet life, praying often to God. God gave him great wisdom and the light of victory burned in his heart. This young man longed to expose the lovelessness and injustice of the villagers and to challenge them to seek again for the true life. Such people are usually very embarrassing to their fellowmen, and because of this they are hated, scorned, and persecuted. So it was with this youth too. But he did not slacken in his struggle, for all his longing and striving were directed toward leading his people out of the inner and outer misery which surrounded them. The old mountain mass still lay across the stream like a heavy judgment and the glorious water remained blocked up.

One night the young man had a dream. He dreamed that God showed to him the particular boulder which was damming up the water. To raise this boulder, he had to be ready to give up his life and be buried beneath it.

So, for the sake of the people's redemption, he raised the boulder and was buried and died. Immediately the living water burst forth and watered the soil of the valley as in days gone by. The old life of fruitfulness and prosperity was restored to the valley, the hearts of the people were lightened, and love was kindled again in all of them. They were all united once more like a large family under the fatherly protection of God's love.

Through the power of the surging, life-giving water, the young hero was awakened to new life, and from that time on he was the leader and shepherd of his people. They were freed from gold, diamonds, and all useless things. Everyone who sought for and drank the water of that valley became one with the great family of this new people. Pure love

was the fulfillment of their lives. The whole countryside flourished in the beauty of Paradise, and the earth brought forth fruit a thousand-fold.

THE LEGEND OF CHRISTOPHERUS

Hans Thoma

Once upon a time a boy was born, and his parents named him Opherus. He was a very strong boy, and did not know what to do with all his strength. Even at a young age, he broke tools and agricultural equipment. His father often did not know how to occupy him because, in spite of his good will, he did more harm than his work was worth. All his father's tools were too weak for his strong arms. You should have seen his muscles!

By the time he became a young man, Opherus looked like a giant. One day his father sent him to the fields to plough. Since the horses were too slow for Opherus, he set them loose and pushed the plough through the field himself at great speed. After a few hours, the plough fell to pieces. His father was sad because Opherus always meant well; he was simply too strong. He said to his son, "Opherus, you must serve a greater and stronger master where you can use your strength in a right and proper way."

So Opherus left home. He went to the king of the land and offered to serve him. Since the king was at war with a powerful nation, he was glad to have such a strong servant. Opherus served his king faithfully for several years.

One day a visitor at the king's court mentioned the name of the devil in a conversation. The king became uneasy. In fact, he was downright

frightened. Opherus was surprised that his king could show such fear, since he had hoped that he was serving the strongest master. The king had to admit that he feared the devil. And so Opherus decided he must leave the king to seek this devil who was so powerful.

It did not take very long before Opherus found the devil. He came to Opherus in the form of a terrible warrior, and gladly took him into his service. And that is how Opherus became a faithful servant of the devil. In the service of evil he did terrible things, but he was glad because he had found a strong master.

One day, Opherus was riding with the devil over the countryside. At the wayside stood a cross. The devil looked frightened of the cross, and made a big detour around it. Opherus was startled. He began asking the devil about its meaning, and he found out that the man Jesus Christ, who had hung upon just such a cross, was even stronger than the devil.

Opherus left the devil that very moment and began seeking Christ. He inquired everywhere if anyone had heard of Christ, or knew where he could be found. As he was searching, lonely and burdened with many evil deeds, Opherus met a hermit who told him that if he wanted to find Christ, he must first find remorse and repentance. But Opherus had a different idea about life. He told the hermit he wanted to do more than just sit and repent.

Then the hermit showed him a great river which travelers had to cross. It had no bridge. The water was deep and the current strong. He said to Opherus, "If you carry poor wayfarers over this river out of love, you may find what you seek."

For many years, Opherus did as the hermit said. He did not spare himself; day or night he was ready to help the travelers who passed. He built himself a little hut at the edge of the river, and if someone called he carried them across the dangerous waters. But in all this time, his one longing was to find Jesus Christ.

It happened once on a very stormy night that he heard a voice crying, "Opherus, carry me over." He left his house and walked up and down the riverbank, but found no one. So he returned to his hut and fell asleep again. But the voice called again, a very small voice, saying, "Opherus, Opherus, carry me over." Again he went out, but no one was there. So he thought it must be the wind, and he lay down again. It did not take long before he heard the voice a third time. It sounded at first like a cry, and then he heard his name through the wind, "Opherus, Opherus, come carry me over this water."

This time he found a little child huddled on the riverbank. He lifted the little boy on his shoulder, where he seemed quite light, but when he entered the water the child became heavier and heavier. Soon he became such a burden that Opherus almost broke down under the weight. He cried out, "Oh, little child, you seem to be so very heavy—it is as if I were carrying the whole earth on my shoulders."

Then the child answered, "You not only carry the world and the heavens, but you carry him who bears the whole need of the world upon himself. I am Jesus Christ, your King whom you serve and whom you seek."

And the child spoke further to Opherus, "From now on you will fear neither death nor the devil. You will walk through the suffering of this world and your name will be Christopherus, which means 'bearer of Christ.' Your soul will be illuminated with the love of God, and you will show mercy to men."

Then the child disappeared, but Christopherus followed his commandment and went out to the people of the earth. Wherever he went, he witnessed to the love and power of the child, his King.

Many of his old friends did not like the change in Opherus. They began to persecute him and drive him away, for they did not want to hear his message. Their hatred became so strong that they banded

together and killed him. But his voice and his challenge to become carriers of Christ could not be killed.

Let us open our ears, so that we also may hear the voice calling us to carry the King over.

LEGENDS OF FRANCIS OF ASSISI

As told by J. Heinrich Arnold

Almost eight hundred years ago there lived in Assisi in Italy a rich man called Pietro Bernardone. While Pietro was in France in the autumn of the year 1182, his wife in Assisi had a son. Because the father loved France so much, he named his son Francesco. This Francesco is known in the whole world as Francis of Assisi or Saint Francis.

As a child Francis had everything. His father was what is called New Rich—he had not always been rich, but he became very rich and showed his money around and was very proud of it. His son Francis was the richest among his friends and therefore was their leader. They did many things that were not right.

It is said of Francis that he held his nose when he saw a leper. You have to know what it means to live with lepers. Lepers were not allowed to live close to healthy people because they were fearful of becoming sick themselves. People treated them as outcasts and sent them out of their villages and towns to places where they lived in miserable circumstances. I have lived with them, and the smell is very bad, partly because of their poverty. Francis could not stand it.

Francis was hurt that he was not of noble birth. A newly rich man usually comes from poor circumstances. People of noble birth may be poor in money, but their way of life is different from that of the lower

classes. So Francis wanted to become a knight. There were wars being fought, and he went to war voluntarily, hoping that the king would knight him. (That is hardly done anymore in our day. It is not done at all in America, but in England it is still done by the king or queen.) As a soldier he was taken prisoner, and he came home quite sick. He was not the joyful young man he had been.

Now one day an inner change happened in Francis. It was as if a voice spoke to him, saying, "Who can do more for you, the Lord or men?" The Lord is Jesus. And Francis answered, "Jesus." He became a deeply thinking person. About that time, as he rode out of the town of Assisi, he met a leper and kissed him. That was the beginning of the change—he was no longer afraid of becoming sick himself.

So Francis experienced a complete inner change and gave his life to God. He went into a church and prayed and asked Jesus what he could do for Him. Jesus answered, and Francis heard the voice three times: "Do you not see what state my Church is in?" Francis thought Jesus meant the church building, and most people think he meant the church building. But it must have meant that Francis was to have an influence on men's lives. I believe Jesus meant that the Christians, those who believe in Jesus, should be renewed in their hearts.

Francis saw that the church building was in very poor condition with a leaking roof. So he went to his father's store and took a lot of valuable material, put it all on his horse, and sold it in town. With the money he wanted to repair the church. His father was furious and wanted to have him put in prison for stealing. As long as Francis lived only for himself, his father was ready to give him anything he wanted. But when he wanted to live for God, his father did not want to give him everything he asked for anymore. The problem was laid before the Bishop, and in the Bishop's presence Francis gave his father everything he had, even his clothing. He stood there without even a shirt and laid

down his money and clothing, and the Bishop gave him something to wear to cover his nakedness.

At first he lived with lepers. Now I tell you openly, to live with lepers is a tragic life, even in our day and at the time I was with them. They are lonely and despised, poor and bad-smelling. Francis lived with the lepers and was their friend. He went begging in those circles where he had been the rich young man, the one who had paid for everything. He went to these same people and begged food for the lepers and for himself. People laughed at him and thought he was not quite right in his head. It was unheard of that he, who could have been a rich man, went about in such poor dress and begged for money and food. Actually he hardly accepted any money at that time, and later he never accepted money at all. The story says that people threw mud and dirt at him when he begged, but Francis of Assisi blessed them. He was not angry with them. He who had been well loved was now despised.

A LEGEND TELLS that in Assisi there lived a very rich and wise and noble man called Bernard. When Bernard saw Francis begging in the streets as a poor man, he thought, "Either this man is crazy, or God is with him." Bernard wanted to find out which, so he invited him to supper. Francis accepted the invitation, and at supper Bernard was surprised to find that this despised man could be so firm and so loving and kind. He invited Francis to stay the night, because he had in mind to watch Francis during the night.

Francis went to bed as though he didn't want to do anything else but sleep. He waited till he thought Bernard was asleep. But Bernard wanted to stay awake, so he snored, pretending to be asleep. When Francis thought Bernard was asleep, he got out of bed, knelt down, and prayed the same prayer all night: "My Lord and my all! My God and my all!"

Why did Francis wait until he thought Bernard was asleep? It was because Jesus said we should not make a show or boast with our piety.

We should lock the door, and when we are alone and in secret, God will see us in the secret place. So he thought Bernard was asleep, and he prayed the whole night, “My God and my all!” This short prayer, “My God and my all!” is very deep. Francis of Assisi wept bitterly as he prayed. And Bernard also started to weep bitterly about this prayer, “My God and my all!” Francis forgot that Bernard was in the room. He continued praying, “My God and my all!” and Bernard also prayed, “My God and my all!”

When morning dawned, Bernard got up and said to Francis, “I want to give up everything. I want to follow Jesus like you.” All doubts that Francis was perhaps a little crazy were gone—now Bernard was sure that Francis was a man of God. He said to Francis, “Brother, I have decided to give up my self and just to beg and to go with you.” Francis spoke with great joy and said, “Before we do anything, let us hear what Jesus Christ has to say to this. Let us go to a prayer meeting and listen to what is said there.” He asked the man who held the prayer meeting to read from the Bible, and he read the words of Jesus: “If you want to be perfect, sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and then come and follow me,” and, “He who wants to follow me must deny himself and take his cross upon his shoulder and follow me.” Then Francis spoke with joy to Brother Bernard and said, “Now we have heard it—go and do it.” So Bernard went and sold everything and gave it to the poor, and then he joined Francis.

And so one brother after another came and joined this group of men who lived in community as brothers.

Now, TOO MUCH eating and drinking is not good either for the soul or for the body. In the circle of brothers around Francis there was much fasting. They took it very seriously and did not eat anything for days. One night when Francis and his brothers were asleep, one of the broth-

ers suddenly cried in a loud voice, "I am dying! I am dying!" All the brothers woke up with a shock, and Francis got up and lit a candle. Francis asked, "Who was it that cried out, 'I am dying'?" One of them said, "It was I." Then Francis asked him, "What is it, brother? Why do you think you are dying?" "I am so hungry," he said. He had fasted and had been without food for several days.

Francis immediately set the table for all the brothers and said, "Let us eat with this brother." He told them that fasting was good, but that a man should not forget his nature and no one should ask more of his own body than it can carry. "My beloved ones," he said, "it may be that one person can live with less food than another. Let us not copy one another. Each one should eat as much as he needs to be able to work. The Lord wants compassion, not outward sacrifice."

FRANCIS SAID TO HIS BROTHERS, "If you want to preach, first your heart should burn." That was the secret of his Christianity and of his mission, that his heart burned before he preached or spoke to the people.

THE SACRED FLAME

Selma Lagerlöf

A great many years ago, when the city of Florence had only just been made a republic, a man lived there named Raniero di Raniero. He was the son of an armorer, and had learned his father's trade, but he did not care much to pursue it.

This Raniero was the strongest of men. It was said of him that he bore a heavy iron armor as lightly as others wear a silk shirt. He was still a young man, but already he had given many proofs of his strength. Once he was in a house where grain was stored in the loft. Too much grain had been heaped there, and while Raniero was in the house one of the loft beams broke down, and the whole roof was about to fall in. He raised his arms and held the roof up until the people managed to fetch beams and poles to prop it.

It was also said of Raniero that he was the bravest man that had ever lived in Florence, and that he could never get enough of fighting. As soon as he heard any noise in the street, he rushed out from the workshop in hopes that a fight had arisen in which he might participate. If he could only distinguish himself, he fought just as readily with humble peasants as with armored horsemen. He rushed into a fight like a lunatic, without counting his opponents.

Florence was not very powerful in his time. The people were mostly wool spinners and cloth weavers, and these asked nothing better than to be allowed to perform their tasks in peace. Sturdy men were plenti-

ful, but they were not quarrelsome, and they were proud of the fact that in their city better order prevailed than elsewhere. Raniero often grumbled because he was not born in a country where there was a king who gathered around him valiant men, and declared that in such an event he would have attained great honor and renown.

Raniero was loud-mouthed and boastful, cruel to animals, harsh toward his wife, and not good for anyone to live with. He would have been handsome if he had not had several deep scars across his face which disfigured him. He was quick to jump at conclusions, and quick to act, though his way was often violent.

Raniero was married to Francesca, who was the daughter of Jacopo degli Uberti, a wise and influential man. Jacopo had not been very anxious to give his daughter to such a bully as Raniero, and had opposed the marriage until the very last. Francesca forced him to relent by declaring that she would never marry anyone else. When Jacopo finally gave his consent, he said to Raniero, "I have observed that men like you can more easily win a woman's love than keep it. Therefore I shall exact this promise from you: If my daughter finds life with you so hard that she wishes to come back to me, you will not prevent her." Francesca said it was needless to exact such a promise, since she loved Raniero so much that nothing could separate her from him.

But Raniero gave his promise promptly. "Of one thing you can be assured, Jacopo," said he, "I will not try to hold any woman who wishes to flee from me."

Then Francesca went to live with Raniero, and all was well between them for a time. When they had been married a few weeks, Raniero took it into his head that he would practice marksmanship. For several days he aimed at a painting which hung upon a wall. He soon became skilled and hit the mark every time. At last he thought he would like to try and shoot at a more difficult mark. He looked around for something

suitable, but discovered nothing except a quail that sat in a cage above the courtyard gate. The bird belonged to Francesca, and she was very fond of it. Despite this, Raniero sent a page to open the cage and shot the quail as it swung itself into the air. This seemed to him a very good shot, and he boasted of it to anyone who would listen to him.

When Francesca learned that Raniero had shot her bird, she grew pale and looked hard at him. She marveled that he had wished to do a thing which must bring grief to her, but she forgave him promptly and loved him as before. Then all went well again for a time.

Raniero's father-in-law, Jacopo, was a flax weaver. He had a large establishment where much work was done. Raniero thought he had discovered that hemp was mixed with the flax in Jacopo's workshop, and he did not keep silent about it, but talked of it here and there in the city. At last Jacopo also heard this chatter, and tried at once to put a stop to it. He let several other flax weavers examine his yarn and cloth, and they found all of it to be of the very finest flax. Only in one pack, which was designed to be sold outside of Florence, was there any mixture. Then Jacopo said that the deception had been practiced without his knowledge or consent by one of his journeymen. He realized at once that he would find it difficult to convince people of this. He had always been famed for honesty, and he felt very keenly that his honor had been smirched.

Raniero, on the other hand, plumed himself on having succeeded in exposing a fraud, and he bragged about it even in Francesca's hearing. She felt deeply grieved and was as astonished as when he shot the bird. As she thought of this, she seemed suddenly to see her love before her, and it was like a great piece of shimmery gold cloth. She could see how big it was, and how it shimmered. But from one corner a piece had been cut away, so that the cloth was not as big and as beautiful as it had been in the beginning. Still, it was damaged so very little that she

thought, "It will probably last as long as I live. It is so great that it can never come to an end."

Again there was a period during which she and Raniero were just as happy as they had been at first.

Francesca had a brother named Taddeo. He had been in Venice on a business trip, and while there had purchased garments of silk and velvet. When he came home he paraded around in them. Now, in Florence it was not the custom to go about expensively clad, so there were many who made fun of him.

One night Taddeo and Raniero were out in the wine shops. Taddeo was dressed in a green cloak with sable lining, and a violet jacket. Raniero tempted him to drink so much wine that he fell asleep, and then he took his cloak off him and hung it upon a scarecrow that was set up in a cabbage patch.

When Francesca heard of this she was vexed again with Raniero. That moment she again saw before her the big piece of gold cloth which was her love, and she seemed to see how it diminished as Raniero cut away piece after piece.

After this, things were patched up between them for a time, but Francesca was no longer so happy as in former days, because she always feared that Raniero would commit some misdemeanor that would hurt her love. This was not long in coming either, for Raniero could never be tranquil. He wished that people should always speak of him and praise his courage and daring.

At that time the cathedral in Florence was much smaller than the present one, and there hung at the top of one of its towers a big, heavy shield which had been placed there by one of Francesca's ancestors. It was the heaviest shield any man in Florence had been able to lift, and all the Uberti family were proud because it was one of their own who had climbed up in the tower and hung it there.

But Raniero climbed up to the shield one day, hung it on his back, and came down with it. When Francesca heard of this for the first time she spoke to Raniero of what troubled her and begged him not to humiliate her family in this way. Raniero, who had expected that she would commend him for his feat, became very angry. He retorted that he had long observed that she did not rejoice in his success, but thought only of her own kin. "It's something else I am thinking of," said Francesca, "and that is my love. I know not what will become of it if you keep on in this way."

After this they frequently exchanged harsh words, for Raniero happened nearly always to do the very thing that was most distasteful to Francesca.

There was a workman in Raniero's shop who was little and lame. This man had loved Francesca before she was married and continued to love her even after her marriage. Raniero, who knew this, undertook to joke with him before all who sat at a meal. It went so far that finally the man could no longer bear to be held up to ridicule in Francesca's hearing, so he rushed upon Raniero and wanted to fight with him. But Raniero only smiled derisively and kicked him aside. Then the poor fellow thought he did not care to live any longer, and went off and hanged himself.

When this happened, Francesca and Raniero had been married about a year. Francesca continually saw her love before her as a shimmery piece of cloth with large pieces cut away on all sides, so that it was scarcely half as big as it had been in the beginning. She became very much alarmed at this and thought, "If I stay with Raniero another year, he will destroy my love. I shall become just as poor as I have hitherto been rich." Then she decided to leave Raniero's house and go to live with her father, that the day might not come when she should hate Raniero as much as she now loved him.

Jacopo degli Uberti was sitting at the loom with all his workmen busy around him when he saw her coming. He said that now the thing had come to pass which he had long expected, and bade her be welcome. Instantly he ordered all the people to leave off their work and arm themselves and close the house. Then Jacopo went over to Raniero. He met him in the workshop. "My daughter has this day returned to me and begged that she may live again under my roof," he said to his son-in-law. "And now I expect that you will not compel her to return to you, after the promise you have given me."

Raniero did not seem to take this very seriously, but answered calmly, "Even if I had not given you my word, I would not demand the return of a woman who does not wish to be mine." He knew how much Francesca loved him, and said to himself, "She will be back with me before the evening."

Yet she did not appear either that day or the next. The third day Raniero went out and pursued a couple of robbers who had long disturbed the Florentine merchants. He succeeded in catching them, and took them as captives to Florence. He remained quiet a couple of days, until he was positive that this feat was known throughout the city. But it did not turn out as he had expected, and Francesca did not come back to him.

Raniero had a great desire to appeal to the courts to force her to return to him, but he felt unable to do this because of his promise. It seemed impossible for him to live in the same city with a wife who had abandoned him, so he moved away from Florence. He first became a soldier, and very soon he made himself commander of a volunteer company. He was always in a fight, and served many masters. He won much renown as a warrior, as he had always said he would. He was made a knight by the Emperor, and was accounted a great man.

Before he left Florence, he had made a vow at a sacred image of the Madonna in the Cathedral to present to the Blessed Virgin the best

and rarest that he won in every battle. Before this image one always saw costly gifts which were presented by Raniero. Raniero was aware that all his deeds were known in his native city. He marveled much that Francesca degli Uberti did not come back to him, when she knew all about his success.

At that time sermons were preached to start the Crusades for the recovery of the Holy Sepulcher from the Saracens, and Raniero took the cross and departed for the Orient. He hoped not only to win castles and lands to rule over, but also to succeed in performing such brilliant feats that his wife would again admire him and return to him.

II

ON THE NIGHT following the day on which Jerusalem had been captured there was great rejoicing in the Crusaders' camp outside the city. In almost every tent the soldiers celebrated with bouts of drinking, and noise and roistering were heard in every direction. Raniero di Raniero sat and drank with some comrades, and in his tent it was even more hilarious than elsewhere. The servants barely had time to fill the goblets before they were empty again.

Raniero had the best of reasons for celebrating because during the day he had won greater glory than ever before. In the morning, when the city was besieged, he had been the first to scale the walls after Godfrey of Bologna, and in the evening he had been honored for his bravery in the presence of the whole corps.

When the plunder and murder were ended, the Crusaders marched in penitents' cloaks and with lighted candles into the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. It had then been announced to Raniero by Godfrey that he should be the first to light his candle from the sacred flames which burn before Christ's tomb. It seemed to Raniero that Godfrey

wished to show that he considered him the bravest man in the whole corps, and he was very happy about the way in which he had been rewarded for his achievements.

As the night wore on, Raniero and his guests were in the best of spirits. A fool and a couple of musicians who had wandered all over the camp and amused the people with their pranks came into Raniero's tent, and the fool asked permission to tell a comic story. Raniero knew that this particular fool was in great demand for his drollery, and he promised to listen to his narrative.

"It happened once," said the fool, "that our Lord and Saint Peter sat a whole day upon the highest tower in Paradise Stronghold and looked down upon the earth. They had so much to look at that they scarcely found time to exchange a word. Our Lord kept perfectly still the whole time, but Saint Peter sometimes clapped his hands for joy, and again turned his head away in disgust. Sometimes he applauded and smiled, and anon he wept and lamented. Finally, as the day ended, and twilight sank over Paradise, our Lord turned to Saint Peter and said that now he must surely be satisfied and content. 'What is it that I should be content with?' Saint Peter asked in an impetuous tone. 'Why,' said our Lord slowly, 'I thought that you would be pleased with what you have seen today.' But Saint Peter did not care to be conciliated. 'It is true,' said he, 'that for many years I have bemoaned the fact that Jerusalem should be in the power of unbelievers, but after all that has happened today, I think it might just as well have remained as it was.'"

Raniero understood now that the fool spoke of what had taken place during the day. Both he and the other knights began to listen with greater interest than in the beginning.

"When Saint Peter had said this," continued the fool, as he cast a furtive glance at the knights, "he leaned over the pinnacle of the tower and pointed toward the earth. He showed our Lord a city which lay

upon a great solitary rock that shot up from a mountain valley. ‘Do you see those mounds of corpses?’ he said. ‘And do you see the naked and wretched prisoners who moan in the night chill? And do you see all the smoking ruins?’ It appeared as if our Lord did not wish to answer him, but Saint Peter went on. He said that he had certainly been vexed with that city many times, but he had not wished it so ill that it should come to this. Then at last our Lord answered, and tried an objection: ‘Still, you cannot deny that the Christian knights have risked their lives with the utmost fearlessness,’ said he.”

Then the fool was interrupted by bravos, but he made haste to continue. “Oh, don’t interrupt me!” he said. “Now I don’t remember where I left off—ah! to be sure, I was just going to say that Saint Peter wiped away a tear or two which sprang to his eyes and prevented him from seeing. ‘I never would have thought they could be such beasts,’ said he. ‘They have murdered and plundered the whole day. Why you went to all the trouble of letting yourself be crucified in order to gain such devotees, I can’t in the least comprehend.’”

The knights took up the fun good-naturedly. They began to laugh loud and merrily. “What, fool! Is Saint Peter so wroth with us?” shrieked one of them.

“Be silent now, and let us hear if our Lord spoke in our defense!” interposed another.

“No, our Lord was silent. He knew of old that when Saint Peter had once got a-going, it wasn’t worthwhile to argue with him. He went on in his way, and said that our Lord needn’t trouble to tell him that finally they remembered to which city they had come, and went to church barefooted and in penitents’ garb. That spirit had, of course, not lasted long enough to be worth mentioning. And thereupon he leaned once more over the tower and pointed downward toward Jerusalem. He pointed out the Christians’ camp outside the city. ‘Do you see how

your knights celebrate their victories?’ he asked. And our Lord saw that there was revelry everywhere in the camp. Knights and soldiers sat and looked upon Syrian dancers. Filled goblets went the rounds while they threw dice for the spoils of war and...”

“They listened to fools who told vile stories,” interpolated Raniero. “Was not this also a great sin?”

The fool laughed and shook his head at Raniero, as much as to say, “Wait! I will pay you back.”

“No, don’t interrupt me!” he begged once again. “A poor fool forgets so easily what he would say. Ah! it was this: Saint Peter asked our Lord if he thought these people were much of a credit to him. To this, of course, our Lord had to reply that he didn’t think they were. ‘They were robbers and murderers before they left home, and robbers and murderers they are even today. This undertaking you could just as well have left undone. No good will come of it,’ said Saint Peter.”

“Come, come, fool!” said Raniero in a threatening tone. But the fool seemed to consider it a point of honor to test how far he could go without someone jumping up and throwing him out, and he continued fearlessly.

“Our Lord only bowed his head, like one who acknowledges that he is justly rebuked. But almost at the same instant he leaned forward eagerly and peered down with closer scrutiny than before. Saint Peter also glanced down. ‘What are you looking for?’ he wondered.”

The fool delivered this speech with much animated facial play. All the knights saw our Lord and Saint Peter before their eyes, and they wondered what it was our Lord had caught sight of.

“Our Lord answered that it was nothing in particular,” said the fool. “Saint Peter gazed in the direction of our Lord’s glance, but he could discover nothing except that our Lord sat and looked down into a big tent, outside of which a couple of Saracen heads were set up on long

lances, and where a lot of fine rugs, golden vessels, and costly weapons, captured in the Holy City, were piled up. In that tent they carried on as they did everywhere else in the camp. A company of knights sat and emptied their goblets. The only difference might be that here there were more drinking and roistering than elsewhere. Saint Peter could not comprehend why our Lord was so pleased that his eyes fairly sparkled with delight when he looked down there. He had rarely before seen so many hard and cruel faces gathered around a drinking table. And he who was host at the board and sat at the head of the table was the most dreadful of all. He was a man of thirty-five, frightfully big and coarse, with a blowzy countenance covered with scars and scratches, callused hands, and a loud, bellowing voice.”

Here the fool paused a moment, as if he feared to go on, but both Raniero and the others liked to hear him talk of themselves, and only laughed at his audacity. “You’re a daring fellow,” said Raniero, “so let us see what you are driving at!”

“Finally, our Lord said a few words,” continued the fool, “which made Saint Peter understand what he rejoiced over. He asked Saint Peter if he saw wrongly, or if it could actually be true that one of the knights had a burning candle beside him.”

Raniero gave a start at these words. Now, at last, he was angry with the fool, and reached out his hand for a heavy wine pitcher to throw at his face, but he controlled himself that he might hear whether the fellow wished to speak to his credit or discredit.

“Saint Peter saw now,” continued the fool, “that, although the tent was lighted mostly by torches, one of the knights really had a burning wax candle beside him. It was a long, thick candle, one of the sort made to burn twenty-four hours. The knight, who had no candlestick to set it in, had gathered together some stones and piled them around it to make it stand.”

The company burst into shrieks of laughter at this. All pointed at a candle which stood on the table beside Raniero and was exactly like the one the fool had described. The blood mounted to Raniero's head, for this was the candle which he had a few hours before been permitted to light at the Holy Sepulcher. He had been unable to let it die out.

"When Saint Peter saw that candle," said the fool, "it dawned upon him what it was that our Lord was so happy over, but at the same time he could not help feeling just a little sorry for him. 'Oh,' he said, 'it was the same knight that leaped upon the wall this morning immediately after the gentleman of Bologna, and who this evening was permitted to light his candle at the Holy Sepulcher ahead of all the others.' 'True!' said our Lord. 'And, as you see, his candle is still burning.'"

The fool talked very fast now, casting an occasional sly glance at Raniero. "Saint Peter could not help pitying our Lord. 'Can't you understand why he keeps that candle burning?' said he. 'You must believe that he thinks of your sufferings and death whenever he looks at it. But he thinks only of the glory which he won when he was acknowledged to be the bravest man in the troop after Godfrey.'"

At this all Raniero's guests laughed. Raniero was very angry, but he, too, forced himself to laugh. He knew they would have found it still more amusing if he hadn't been able to take a little fun.

"But our Lord contradicted Saint Peter," said the fool. "'Don't you see how careful he is with the light?' asked he. 'He puts his hand before the flame as soon as anyone raises the tent-flap for fear the draught will blow it out. And he is constantly occupied in chasing away the moths which fly around it and threaten to extinguish it.'"

The laughter grew merrier and merrier, for what the fool said was the truth. Raniero found it more and more difficult to control himself. He felt he could not endure that anyone should joke about the sacred candle.

“Still, Saint Peter was dubious,” continued the fool. “He asked our Lord if he knew that knight. ‘He’s not one who goes often to Mass or wears out the prie-dieu,’ said he. But our Lord could not be swerved from his opinion. ‘Saint Peter, Saint Peter,’ he said earnestly. ‘Remember that henceforth this knight shall become more pious than Godfrey. Whence do piety and gentleness spring, if not from my sepulcher? You shall see Raniero di Raniero help widows and distressed prisoners. You shall see him care for the sick and despairing as he now cares for the sacred candle flame.’”

At this they laughed inordinately. It struck them all as very ludicrous, for they knew Raniero’s disposition and mode of living. But he himself found both the jokes and laughter intolerable. He sprang to his feet and wanted to reprove the fool. As he did this, he bumped so hard against the table—which was only a door set up on loose boxes—that it wobbled, and the candle fell down. It was evident now how careful Raniero was to keep the candle burning. He controlled his anger and gave himself time to pick it up and brighten the flame, before he rushed upon the fool. But when he had trimmed the light the fool had already darted out of the tent, and Raniero knew it would be useless to pursue him in the darkness. “I shall probably run across him another time,” he thought, and sat down.

Meanwhile the guests had laughed mockingly, and one of them turned to Raniero and wanted to continue the jesting. He said, “There is one thing, however, which is certain, Raniero, and that is—this time you can’t send to the Madonna in Florence the most precious things you have won in the battle.”

Raniero asked why he thought that he should not follow his old habit this time. “For no other reason,” said the knight, “than that the most precious thing you have won is that sacred candle flame, which you were permitted to light at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in the presence of the whole corps. Surely you can’t send that to Florence!”

Again the other knights laughed, but Raniero was now in the mood to undertake the wildest projects, just to put an end to their laughter. He came to a conclusion quickly, called to an old squire, and said to him, "Make ready, Giovanni, for a long journey. Tomorrow you shall travel to Florence with this sacred candle flame."

But the squire said a blunt No to this command. "This is something which I don't care to undertake," he said. "How would it be possible to travel to Florence with a candle flame? It would be extinguished before I had left the camp."

Raniero asked one after another of his men. He received the same reply from all. They scarcely seemed to take his command seriously. The foreign knights who were his guests laughed ever louder and more merrily, as it became apparent that none of Raniero's men wished to carry out his order.

Raniero grew more and more excited. Finally he lost his patience and shouted, "This candle flame shall nevertheless be borne to Florence, and since no one else will ride there with it, I will do so myself!"

"Consider before you promise anything of the kind!" said a knight. "You ride away from a principality."

"I swear to you that I will carry this sacred flame to Florence!" exclaimed Raniero. "I shall do what no one else has cared to undertake."

The old squire defended himself. "Master, it's another matter for you. You can take with you a large retinue, but me you would send alone." But Raniero was clean out of himself, and did not consider his words. "I, too, shall travel alone," said he.

But with this declaration Raniero had carried his point. Everyone in the tent had ceased laughing. Terrified, they sat and stared at him. "Why don't you laugh anymore?" asked Raniero. "This undertaking surely can't be anything but a child's game for a brave man."

III

THE NEXT MORNING at dawn Raniero mounted his horse. He was in full armor, but over it he had thrown a coarse pilgrim cloak, so that the iron dress should not become overheated by exposure to the sun's rays. He was armed with a sword and battle-club, and rode a good horse. He held in his hand a burning candle, and to the saddle he had tied a couple of bundles of long wax candles, so the flame should not die out for lack of nourishment.

Raniero rode slowly through the long, encumbered tent street, and thus far all went well. It was still so early that the mists which had arisen from the deep dales surrounding Jerusalem were not dispersed, and Raniero rode forward as in a white night. The whole troop slept, and Raniero passed the guards easily. None of them called out his name, for the mist prevented their seeing him and the roads were covered with a dust-like soil a foot high, which made the horse's tramp inaudible.

Raniero was soon outside the camp and started on the road which led to Joppa. Here it was smoother, but he rode very slowly now, because of the candle, which burned feebly in the thick mist. Big insects kept dashing against the flame. Raniero had all he could do guarding it, but he was in the best of spirits and thought all the while that the mission which he had undertaken was so easy that a child could manage it.

Meanwhile, the horse grew weary of the slow pace, and began to trot. The flame began to flicker in the wind. It didn't help that Raniero tried to shield it with his hand and with the cloak. He saw that it was about to be extinguished.

But he had no desire to abandon the project so soon. He stopped the horse, sat still a moment, and pondered. Then he dismounted and tried sitting backwards, so that his body shielded the flame from the

wind. In this way he succeeded in keeping it burning, but he realized now that the journey would be more difficult than he had thought at the beginning.

When he had passed the mountains which surround Jerusalem, the fog lifted. He rode onward now in the greatest solitude. There were no people, houses, green trees, nor plants—only bare rocks.

Here Raniero was attacked by robbers. They were idle folk who followed the camp without permission, and lived by theft and plunder. They had lain in hiding behind a hill, and Raniero—who rode backwards—had not seen them until they had surrounded him and brandished their swords at him.

There were about twelve men. They looked wretched, and rode poor horses. Raniero saw at once that it would not be difficult for him to break through this company and ride on. And after his proud boast of the night before, he was unwilling to abandon his undertaking easily. He saw no other means of escape than to compromise with the robbers. He told them that, since he was armed and rode a good horse, it might be difficult to overpower him if he defended himself. And as he was bound by a vow, he did not wish to offer resistance, but they could take whatever they wanted without a struggle, if only they promised not to put out his light.

The robbers, who had expected a hard struggle, were very happy over Raniero's proposal and began immediately to plunder him. They took from him armor and steed, weapons and money. The only thing they let him keep was the coarse cloak and the two bundles of wax candles. They sacredly kept their promise, also, not to put out the candle flame.

One of them mounted Raniero's horse. When he noticed what a fine animal he was, he felt a little sorry for the rider. He called out to him, "Come, come, we must not be too cruel toward a Christian. You

shall have my old horse to ride.” It was a miserable old screw of a horse. It moved as stiffly, and with as much difficulty, as if it were made of wood.

When the robbers had gone at last and Raniero had mounted the wretched horse, he said to himself, “I must have become bewitched by this candle flame. For its sake I must now travel along the roads like a crazy beggar.” He knew it would be wise for him to turn back, because the undertaking was really impracticable. But such an intense yearning to accomplish it had come over him that he could not resist the desire to go on. Therefore, he went farther. He saw all around him the same bare, yellowish hills.

After a while he came across a goatherd who tended four goats. When Raniero saw the animals grazing on the barren ground, he wondered if they ate earth.

This goatherd had owned a larger flock which had been stolen from him by the Crusaders. When he noticed a solitary Christian come riding toward him, he tried to do him all the harm he could. He rushed up to him and struck at his light with his staff. Raniero was so taken up by the flame that he could not defend himself even against a goatherd. He only drew the candle close to him to protect it. The goatherd struck at it several times more; then he paused, astonished, and ceased striking. He noticed that Raniero’s cloak had caught fire, but Raniero did nothing to smother the blaze, so long as the sacred flame was in danger. The goatherd looked as though he felt ashamed. For a long time he followed Raniero and in one place, where the road was very narrow, with a deep chasm on each side of it, he came up and led the horse for him. Raniero smiled and thought the goatherd surely regarded him as a holy man who had undertaken a voluntary penance.

Toward evening Raniero began to meet people. Rumors of the fall of Jerusalem had already spread to the coast, and a throng of people had

immediately prepared to go up there. There were pilgrims who for years had awaited an opportunity to get into Jerusalem, also some newly arrived troops, but mostly there were merchants who were hastening with provisions.

When these throngs met Raniero, who came riding backwards with a burning candle in his hand, they cried, "A madman, a madman!" The majority were Italians, and Raniero heard how they shouted in his own tongue, "Pazzo, pazzo!"

Raniero, who had been able to keep himself well in check all day, became intensely irritated by these ever-recurring shouts. Instantly he dismounted and began to chastise the offenders with his hard fists. When they saw how heavy the blows were, they took to their heels, and Raniero soon stood alone on the road.

Now Raniero was himself again. "In truth they were right to call me a madman," he said, as he looked around for the light. He did not know what he had done with it. At last he saw that it had rolled down into a hollow. The flame was extinguished, but he saw fire gleam from a dry grass-tuft close beside it, and understood that luck was with him, for the flame had ignited the grass before it had gone out.

"This might have been an inglorious end of a deal of trouble," he thought, as he lit the candle and stepped into the saddle. He was rather mortified. It did not seem to him very probable that his journey would be a success.

In the evening Raniero reached Ramle and rode up to a place where caravans usually had night harbor. It was a large covered yard. All around it were little stalls where travelers could put up their horses. There were no rooms, but folk could sleep beside the animals. The place was overcrowded with people, yet the host found room for Raniero and his horse. He also gave fodder to the horse and food to the rider.

When Raniero perceived that he was well treated, he thought, "I almost believe the robbers did me a service when they took from me

my armor and my horse. I shall certainly get out of the country more easily with my light burden, if they mistake me for a lunatic.” When he had led the horse into the stall, he sat down on a sheaf of straw and held the candle in his hands. It was his intention not to fall asleep but to remain awake all night.

But he had hardly seated himself when he fell asleep. He was fearfully exhausted, and in his sleep he stretched out full length and did not wake till morning. When he awoke he saw neither flame nor candle. He searched in the straw for the candle, but did not find it anywhere. “Someone has taken it from me and extinguished it,” he said. He tried to persuade himself that he was glad that all was over, and that he need not pursue an impossible undertaking.

But as he pondered, he felt a sense of emptiness and loss. He thought that never before had he so longed to succeed in anything on which he had set his mind. He led the horse out and groomed and saddled it. When he was ready to set out, the host who owned the caravansary came up to him with a burning candle. He said in Frankish, “When you fell asleep last night, I had to take your light from you, but here you have it again.”

Raniero betrayed nothing, but said very calmly, “It was wise of you to extinguish it.”

“I have not extinguished it,” said the man. “I noticed that it was burning when you arrived, and I thought it was of importance to you that it should continue to burn. If you see how much it has decreased, you will understand that it has been burning all night.”

Raniero beamed with happiness. He commended the host heartily, and rode away in the best of spirits.

IV

WHEN RANIERO BROKE away from the camp at Jerusalem, he had intended to travel from Joppa to Italy by sea. But after he had been robbed of his money he changed his mind and decided to make the journey by land. It was a long journey. From Joppa he went northward along the Syrian coast. Then he rode westward along the peninsula of Asia Minor, then northward again, all the way to Constantinople. From there he still had a monotonously long distance to travel to reach Florence. During the whole journey Raniero had lived upon the contributions of the pious. They that shared their bread with him mostly were pilgrims who at this time traveled en masse to Jerusalem.

Regardless of the fact that he nearly always rode alone, his days were neither long nor monotonous. He always had to keep guarding the candle flame, and on its account he never could feel at ease. It needed only a puff of breeze or a raindrop and there would have been an end to it.

As Raniero rode over lonely roads and thought only about keeping the flame alive, it occurred to him that once before he had been concerned with something similar. Once before he had seen a person watch over something which was just as sensitive as a candle flame. This recollection was so vague to him at first that he wondered if it was something he had dreamed. But as he rode on alone through the country, it kept recurring to him that he had participated in something similar once before. "It is as if all my life long I had heard tell of nothing else," said he.

One evening he rode into a city. It was after sundown, and the housewives stood in their doorways and watched for their husbands. Then he noticed one who was tall and slender and had earnest eyes. She reminded him of Francesca degli Uberti.

Instantly it became clear to him what he had been pondering over. It came to him that Francesca's love must have been to her as a sacred flame which she had always wished to keep burning, and which she had constantly feared that Raniero would quench. He was astonished at this thought but grew more and more certain that the matter stood thus. For the first time he began to understand why Francesca had left him and that it was not with feats of arms that he should win her back.

The journey which Raniero made was long. This was partly due to the fact that he could not venture out when the weather was bad. Then he sat in some caravansery and guarded the candle flame. These were very trying days.

One day, when he rode over Mount Lebanon, he saw that a storm was brewing. He was riding high up among awful precipices, a frightful distance from any human abode. Finally on the summit of a rock he saw the tomb of a Saracen saint. It was a little square stone structure with a vaulted roof. He thought it best to seek shelter there. He had barely entered when a snowstorm came up which raged for two days and nights. At the same time it grew so cold that he came near freezing to death.

Raniero knew that there were heaps of branches and twigs out on the mountain, and it would not have been difficult for him to gather fuel for a fire. But he considered the candle flame which he carried to be sacred and he did not wish to light anything from it except the candles before the Blessed Virgin's Altar.

The storm increased, and at last he heard thunder and saw gleams of lightning. Then came a flash which struck the mountain, just in front of the tomb, and set fire to a tree. And in this way he was enabled to light his fire without having to borrow of the sacred flame.

As Raniero was riding on through a desolate portion of the Cilician mountain district, his candles were all used up. The candles which he

had brought with him from Jerusalem had long since been consumed, but still he had been able to manage because he had found Christian communities all along the way of whom he had begged fresh candles. But now his resources were exhausted, and he thought that this would be the end of his journey.

When the candle was so nearly burned out that the flame scorched his hand, he jumped from his horse and gathered branches and dry leaves and lit these with the last of the flame. But up on the mountain there was very little that would ignite and the fire would soon burn out.

While he sat and grieved because the sacred flame must die, he heard singing down the road, and a procession of pilgrims came marching up the steep path, bearing candles in their hands. They were on their way to a grotto where a holy man had lived, and Raniero followed them. Among them was a woman who was very old and had difficulty in walking, and Raniero carried her up the mountain.

When she thanked him afterwards, he made a sign to her that she should give him her candle. She did so, and several others also presented him with the candles which they carried. He extinguished the candles, hurried down the steep path, and lit one of them with the last spark from the fire lighted by the sacred flame.

One day at the noon hour it was very warm, and Raniero had lain down to sleep in a thicket. He slept soundly, and the candle stood beside him between a couple of stones. When he had been asleep a while, it began to rain, and this continued for some time, without his waking. When at last he was startled out of his sleep, the ground around him was wet, and he hardly dared glance toward the light, for fear it might be quenched.

But the light burned calmly and steadily in the rain, and Raniero saw that this was because two little birds flew and fluttered just above

the flame. They caressed it with their bills, and held their wings outspread, and in this way they protected the sacred flame from the rain.

He took off his hood immediately, and hung it over the candle. Thereupon he reached out his hand for the two little birds, for he had been seized with a desire to pet them. Neither of them flew away because of him, and he could catch them. He was very much astonished that the birds were not afraid of him. "They do not fear me because they know I have no thought except to protect that which is the most sensitive of all," thought he.

Raniero rode in the vicinity of Nicaea, in Bithynia. Here he met some western gentlemen who were conducting a party of recruits to the Holy Land. In this company was Robert Taillefer who was a wandering knight and a troubadour. Raniero, in his torn cloak, came riding along with the candle in his hand, and the warriors began as usual to shout, "A madman, a madman!" But Robert silenced them, and addressed the rider.

"Have you journeyed far in this manner?" he asked.

"I have ridden like this all the way from Jerusalem," answered Raniero.

"Has your light been extinguished many times during the journey?"

"The flame that lighted the candle with which I rode away from Jerusalem still burns," responded Raniero.

Then Robert Taillefer said to him, "I am also one of those who carry a light, and I would that it burned always. But perchance you, who have brought your light burning all the way from Jerusalem, can tell me what I shall do that it may not become extinguished?"

Then Raniero answered, "Master, it is a difficult task, although it appears to be of slight importance. This little flame demands of you that you shall entirely cease to think of anything else. It will not allow

you to have any sweetheart—in case you should desire anything of the sort—and neither would you dare on account of this flame to sit down at a revel. You cannot have aught else in your thoughts than just this flame, and must possess no other happiness. But my chief reason for advising you against making the journey which I have weathered is that you cannot for an instant feel secure. It matters not through how many perils you may have guarded the flame, you cannot for an instant think yourself secure, but must ever expect that the very next moment it may fail you.”

But Robert Taillefer raised his head proudly and answered, “What you have done for your sacred flame, I may do for mine.”

Raniero arrived in Italy. One day he rode through lonely roads up among the mountains. A woman came running after him and begged him to give her a light from his candle. “The fire in my hut is out,” said she. “My children are hungry. Give me a light that I may heat my oven and bake bread for them!”

She reached for the burning candle, but Raniero held it back because he did not wish that anything should be lighted by that flame but the candles before the image of the Blessed Virgin. Then the woman said to him, “Pilgrim, give me a light, for the life of my children is the flame which I am in duty bound to keep burning!” And because of these words he permitted her to light the wick of her lamp from his flame.

Several hours later he rode into a town. It lay far up on the mountain, where it was very cold. A peasant stood in the road and saw the poor wretch who came riding in his torn cloak. Instantly he slipped off the short mantle which he wore, and flung it to him. But the mantle fell directly over the candle and extinguished the flame.

Then Raniero remembered the woman who had borrowed a light of him. He turned back to her and had his candle lighted anew with sacred fire. When he was ready to ride farther, he said to her, “You say

that the sacred flame which you must guard is the life of your children. Can you tell me what name this candle's flame bears, which I have carried over long roads?"

"Where was your candle lighted?" asked the woman.

"It was lighted at Christ's sepulcher," said Raniero.

"Then it can only be called Gentleness and Love of Humanity," said she.

Raniero laughed at the answer. He thought himself a singular apostle of virtues such as these.

Raniero rode forward between beautiful blue hills. He saw he was near Florence. He was thinking that he must soon part with his light. He thought of his tent in Jerusalem, which he had left filled with trophies, and the brave soldiers who were still in Palestine who would be glad to have him take up the business of war once more and bear them on to new conquests and honors.

Then he perceived that he experienced no pleasure in thinking of this, but that his thoughts were drawn in another direction. He realized then for the first time that he was no longer the same man that had gone from Jerusalem. The journey with the sacred flame had compelled him to rejoice with all who were peaceable and wise and compassionate and to abhor the savage and warlike.

He was happy every time he thought of people who labored peacefully in their homes, and it occurred to him that he would willingly move into his old workshop in Florence and do beautiful and artistic work.

"Verily this flame has created me anew," he thought. "I believe it has made a new man of me."

V

IT WAS EASTERTIDE when Raniero rode into Florence. He had scarcely come in through the city gate—riding backwards, with his hood drawn down over his face and the burning candle in his hand—when a beggar arose and shouted the customary “Pazzo, pazzo!”

At this cry a street gamin darted out of a doorway, and a loafer, who had had nothing else to do for a long time than to lie and gaze at the clouds, jumped to his feet. Both began shouting the same thing, “Pazzo, pazzo!”

Now that there were three who shrieked, they made a good deal of noise and so woke up all the street urchins. They came rushing out from nooks and corners. As soon as they saw Raniero, in his torn coat, on the wretched horse, they shouted, “Pazzo, pazzo!” But this was only what Raniero was accustomed to. He rode quietly up the street, seeming not to notice the shouters.

Then they were not content with merely shouting, but one of them jumped up and tried to blow out the light. Raniero raised the candle on high, trying at the same time to prod his horse and escape the boys. They kept even pace with him, and did everything they could to put out the light.

The more he exerted himself to protect the flame, the more excited they became. They leaped upon one another’s backs, puffed their cheeks out, and blew. They flung their caps at the candle. It was only because they were so numerous and crowded on one another that they did not succeed in quenching the flame. This was the largest procession on the street. People stood at the windows and laughed. No one felt any sympathy with a madman who wanted to defend his candle flame. It was church hour, and many worshippers were on their way to Mass. They, too, stopped and laughed at the sport.

But now Raniero stood upright in the saddle, so that he could shield the candle. He looked wild. The hood had fallen back and they saw his face, which was wasted and pale like a martyr's. The candle he held uplifted as high as he could. The entire street was one great swarm of people. Even the older ones began to take part in the play. The women waved their head shawls and the men swung their caps. Everyone worked to extinguish the light.

Raniero rode under the vine-covered balcony of a house. Upon this stood a woman. She leaned over the latticework, snatched the candle, and ran in with it. The woman was Francesca degli Uberti.

The whole populace burst into shrieks of laughter and shouts, but Raniero swayed in his saddle and fell to the street. As soon as he lay there stricken and unconscious, the street was emptied of people. No one wished to take charge of the fallen man. His horse was the only creature that stopped beside him.

As soon as the crowds had got away from the street, Francesca degli Uberti came out from her house with the burning candle in her hand. She was still lovely—her features were gentle, and her eyes were deep and earnest.

She went up to Raniero and bent over him. He lay senseless, but the instant the candlelight fell upon his face, he moved and roused himself. It was apparent that the candle flame had complete power over him. When Francesca saw that he had regained his senses, she said, "Here is your candle. I snatched it from you, as I saw how anxious you were to keep it burning. I knew of no other way to help you."

Raniero had had a bad fall, and was hurt. But now nothing could hold him back. He began to raise himself slowly. He wanted to walk, but wavered, about to fall. Then he tried to mount his horse. Francesca helped him. "Where do you wish to go?" she asked when he sat in the saddle again. "I want to go to the cathedral," he answered. "Then I shall

accompany you," she said, "for I am going to Mass." And she led the horse for him.

Francesca had recognized Raniero the very moment she saw him, but he did not see who she was, for he had not taken time to notice her. He kept his gaze fixed upon the candle flame alone.

They were absolutely silent all the way. Raniero thought only of the flame and of guarding it well these last moments. Francesca could not speak, for she felt that she did not wish to be certain of that which she feared. She could not believe but that Raniero had come home insane. Although she was almost certain of this, she would rather not speak with him in order to avoid any positive assurance.

After a while Raniero heard someone weep near him. He looked around and saw that it was Francesca degli Uberti who walked beside him, and she wept. But Raniero saw her only for an instant, and said nothing to her. He wanted to think only of the sacred flame.

Raniero let her conduct him to the sacristy. There he dismounted. He thanked Francesca for her help, but looked all the while not upon her, but on the light. He walked alone up to the priests in the sacristy.

Francesca went into the church. It was Easter Eve, and all the candles stood unlighted upon the altars as a symbol of mourning. Francesca thought that every flame of hope which had ever burned within her was now extinguished.

In the church there was profound solemnity. There were many priests at the altar. The canons sat in a body in the chancel, with the bishop among them. By and by Francesca noticed there was commotion among the priests. Nearly all who were not needed to serve at Mass arose and went out into the sacristy. Finally the bishop went, too.

When Mass was over, a priest stepped up to the chancel railing and began to speak to the people. He related that Raniero di Raniero had arrived in Florence with sacred fire from Jerusalem. He narrated what

the rider had endured and suffered on the way. And he praised him. The people sat spellbound and listened to this. Francesca had never before experienced such a blissful moment. "O God!" she sighed, "this is greater happiness than I can bear." Her tears fell as she listened.

The priest talked long and well. Finally he said in a strong, thrilling voice, "It may perchance appear like a trivial thing now, that a candle flame has been brought to Florence. But I say to you, pray God that He will send Florence many bearers of Eternal Light; then she will become a great power, and be extolled as a city among cities!"

When the priest had finished speaking, the entrance doors of the church were thrown open, and a procession of canons and monks and priests marched up the center aisle toward the altar. The bishop came last, and by his side walked Raniero, in the same cloak that he had worn during the entire journey.

But when Raniero had crossed the threshold of the cathedral, an old man arose and walked toward him. It was Oddo, the father of the journeyman who had once worked for Raniero, and had hanged himself because of him. When this man had come up to the bishop and Raniero, he bowed to them. Thereupon he said in such a loud voice that all in the church heard him, "It is a great thing for Florence that Raniero has come with sacred fire from Jerusalem. Such a thing has never before been heard of or conceived. For that reason perhaps there may be many who will say that it is not possible. Therefore, I beg that all the people may know what proofs and witnesses Raniero has brought with him, to assure us that this is actually fire which was lighted in Jerusalem."

When Raniero heard this, he said, "God help me! How can I produce witnesses? I have made the journey alone. Deserts and mountain wastes must come and testify for me."

"Raniero is an honest knight," said the bishop, "and we believe him on his word."

“Raniero must know himself that doubts will arise as to this,” said Oddo. “Surely, he cannot have ridden entirely alone. His little pages could certainly testify for him.”

Then Francesca degli Uberti rushed up to Raniero. “Why need we witnesses?” said she. “All the women in Florence would swear on oath that Raniero speaks the truth!”

Then Raniero smiled, and his countenance brightened for a moment. Thereupon he turned his thoughts and his gaze once more upon the candle flame.

There was a great commotion in the church. Some said that Raniero should not be allowed to light the candles on the altar until his claim was substantiated, and many of his old enemies agreed with this.

Then Jacopo degli Uberti rose and spoke in Raniero’s behalf. “I believe everyone here knows that no very great friendship has existed between my son-in-law and me,” he said, “but now both my sons and I will answer for him. We believe he has performed this task, and we know that one who has been disposed to carry out such an undertaking is a wise, discreet, and noble-minded man, whom we are glad to receive among us.”

But Oddo and many others were not disposed to let him taste of the bliss he was yearning for. They gathered in a close group and it was easy to see that they did not care to withdraw their demand.

Raniero saw that if this should develop into a fight, they would immediately try to get at the candle. As he kept his eyes steadily fixed upon his opponents, he raised the candle as high as he could.

He looked exhausted and distraught and it was apparent that, although he wished to hold out to the very last, he expected defeat. What did it matter to him now if he were permitted to light the candles? Oddo’s word had been a death-blow. When doubt was once awakened, it would spread and increase. He fancied that Oddo had already extinguished the sacred flame forever.

A little bird came fluttering through the great open doors into the church. It flew straight into Raniero's light. He hadn't time to snatch it aside, and the bird dashed against it and put out the flame. Raniero's arm dropped, and tears sprang to his eyes. The first moment he felt this as a sort of relief. It was better thus than if human beings had killed it.

The little bird continued its flight into the church, fluttering confusedly hither and thither, as birds do when they come into a room. Simultaneously a loud cry resounded throughout the church, "The bird is on fire! The sacred candle flame has set its wings on fire!"

The little bird chirped anxiously. For a few moments it fluttered about, like a flickering flame, under the high chancel arches. Then it sank suddenly and dropped dead upon the Madonna's Altar.

But the moment the bird fell upon the Altar, Raniero was standing there. He had forced his way through the church, and no one had been able to stop him. From the sparks which destroyed the bird's wings he lit the candles before the Madonna's Altar.

Then the bishop raised his staff and proclaimed, "God willed it! God has testified for him!"

And all the people in the church, both his friends and opponents, abandoned their doubts and conjectures. They cried as with one voice, transported by God's miracle, "God willed it! God has testified for him!"

OF RANIERO there is now only a legend, which says he enjoyed great good fortune for the remainder of his days, and was wise, and prudent, and compassionate. But the people of Florence always called him Pazzo degli Ranieri, in remembrance of the fact that they had believed him insane. And this became his honorary title. He founded a dynasty, which was named Pazzi, and is called so even to this day.

It might also be worth mentioning that it became a custom in Florence, each year at Easter Eve, to celebrate a festival in memory of Ra-

niero's home-coming with the sacred flame, and that, on this occasion, they always let an artificial bird fly with fire through the church. This festival would most likely have been celebrated even in our day had not some changes taken place recently.

But if it be true, as many hold, that the bearers of sacred fire who have lived in Florence and have made the city one of the most glorious on earth, have taken Raniero as their model, and have thereby been encouraged to sacrifice, to suffer and endure, this may here be left untold.

For what has been done by this light, which in dark times went out from Jerusalem, can neither be measured nor counted.

THE LEGEND OF THE PASSION FLOWER

Otto Gillen

Unnoticed by any human eye, a flower grew at the foot of the cross on Golgotha. It was the only thing growing on those bare racks.

At the hour when the Savior of the world was nailed to the cross, all the feeling and compassion that can be found in a plant surged up in the heart of this little flower. As the soldiers tore the clothing from Jesus, the plant felt as if her own leaves were being torn one by one from her trembling stem. When she saw how Jesus was laid on the hard, cruel Cross and how the nails were driven in, she felt as if someone were gashing her stem. As the cross was erected, a tremor of pain shot through the plant from her roots up to her flower—a terrible pain as if rough hands were wrenching her from the earth.

There above the little plant the Son of Man hung suffering, and she could do nothing for him. How gladly would she have offered herself as balm to his wounds. The little plant's thoughts wandered here and there. What could she possibly do as service to her Lord? Perhaps, if God only gave her strength, she could climb up the Cross and spread her leaves to protect the bruised and wounded body from the hard wood. With all the strength in her small being, the flower lifted her head and clung to the wood of the Cross, stretching herself upward in longing. But try as she might, she only managed to raise herself a little.

The little flower realized that God would not perform a miracle for her sake, and that the Son of Man must drink the cup of suffering to its bitter dregs without any comfort. Even as she trembled with pain, the flower bowed her head before the wisdom of the will of God. At that moment it happened that, because of her childlike compassion, the flower was changed for all time and was lifted high above all her great and small sisters in the eyes of angels and men.

The holy marks of Christ's suffering stamped themselves on this flower at the foot of the Cross: the ring of her petals is a picture of the crown of thorns, the crimson spots signify the many wounds left by the thorns around his holy head, the five stamens are the marks of the five wounds of Jesus, and the three styles are the nails that pierced the Savior's hands and feet. The pistil in the center is a picture of the spear with which a soldier pierced His side.

Because this plant bears the marks of Christ's suffering, she is now called the Passion Flower. She is highly honored by God because she suffered with her crucified Savior in his fear and pain, and was willing to sacrifice herself at an hour when even the disciples had fled.

MARY'S CHILD

Brothers Grimm

Near a great forest dwelt a woodcutter and his wife with their only child, a little girl three years old. They were so poor that they had no daily bread, and did not know how to get food for her. One morning the woodcutter sorrowfully went out to his work in the forest. While he was cutting wood, a tall and beautiful woman with a crown of shining stars on her head suddenly stood before him. She said to him, "I am Mary, mother of the child Jesus. You are poor and needy—bring your child to me, and I will take her with me and be her mother and care for her."

The woodcutter obeyed, brought his child, and gave her to Mary, who took her up to Heaven. There the child fared well: she ate sugar cakes and drank sweet milk, her clothes were of gold, and all the little angels played with her. When she was fourteen years of age, Mary called her one day and said, "Dear child, I am about to make a long journey, so take into your keeping the keys of the thirteen doors of Heaven. Twelve of these doors you may open and you may behold the glory which is within them. But the thirteenth, to which this little key belongs, is forbidden you. Take care not to open it, or you will be unhappy."

The girl promised to be obedient, and when Mary was gone, she began to examine the dwellings of the kingdom of Heaven. Each day she opened one of the doors, until she had made the round of the twelve. In each of them sat one of the apostles in the midst of great light and

splendor, and she rejoiced in all the magnificence and beauty, and the little angels who always accompanied her rejoiced with her.

Then the forbidden door alone remained, and she felt a great desire to know what could be hidden behind it. She said to the angels, "I will not open it entirely, and I will not go inside, but I will unlock it so that we can see just a little through the opening."

"Oh no," said the little angels, "that would be a sin. Mary has forbidden it, and it might easily cause your unhappiness."

Then she was silent. But the desire in her heart was not stilled. It gnawed there and tormented her and let her have no rest. Once when the angels had all gone out, she thought, "Now I am quite alone, and I could peep in. If I do, no one will ever know." She sought out the key, and when she had got it in her hand, she put it in the lock. When she put it in, she turned it round as well. Then the door sprang open, and she saw the holy Trinity sitting there in splendor. She stayed there a while, looking at everything in amazement. Then she touched the light a little with her finger, and her finger became quite golden.

Immediately a great fear fell on her. She shut the door violently and ran away. But her terror would not leave her, do what she might. Her heart beat continually, and she could not be still. The gold too, stayed on her finger and would not go away, no matter how much she washed and rubbed it.

It was not long before Mary came back from her journey. She called the girl before her, and asked to have the keys of Heaven back. When the maiden gave her the keys, Mary looked into her eyes and asked, "Have you not opened the thirteenth door also?"

"No!" she replied.

Then Mary laid her hand on the girl's heart and felt how it beat and beat, and saw at once that she had disobeyed her order and had opened the door. Then she said once again, "Are you certain that you have not done it?"

“Yes,” said the girl for the second time.

Then Mary saw the finger which had become golden from touching the fire of Heaven. Knowing that the child had sinned, she asked for the third time, “Have you not done it?”

“No,” said the girl.

Mary said, “You have not obeyed me, and besides that you have lied. You are no longer worthy to be in Heaven.”

Then the girl fell into a deep sleep. When she woke up, she lay on the earth in the midst of a wilderness. She wanted to cry out, but she could bring forth no sound. She sprang up and wanted to run away, but wherever she turned, she was continually held back by thick hedges of thorns through which she could not break. In the desert in which she was imprisoned there stood an old hollow tree, and this had to be her dwelling place. She crept into this tree when night came. Here she slept and found a shelter from storm and rain, but it was a miserable life, and bitterly did she weep when she remembered how happy she had been in Heaven and how the angels had played with her.

Roots and wild berries were her only food, and for these she sought as far as she could go. In the autumn she picked up the fallen leaves and nuts and carried them into the hole. The nuts were her food in winter, and when snow and ice came, she crept among the leaves like a poor little animal that she might not freeze. Before long her clothes were all torn, and one bit after another fell off her. As soon as the sun shone warm again, she went out and sat in front of the tree, and her long hair covered her on all sides like a mantle. Thus she sat year after year and felt the pain and misery of the world.

One day when the trees were clothed in fresh green the king of the country was hunting in the forest. Following a roe as it fled into a thicket, he got off his horse, tore the bushes asunder, and cut himself a path with his sword. When he had at last forced his way through, he

saw a wonderfully beautiful maiden sitting under the tree covered down to her very feet with her golden hair. He stood still and looked at her full of surprise. Then he spoke to her and said, "Who are you? Why are you sitting here in this wilderness?" But she gave no answer, for she could not speak.

The king continued, "Will you go with me to my castle?" She simply nodded her head a little. The king took her in his arms, carried her to his horse, and rode home with her. When he reached the royal castle, he caused her to be dressed in beautiful garments and gave her all things in abundance. Although she could not speak, she was so beautiful and charming that he began to love her with all his heart, and it was not long before he married her.

After a year had passed, the queen brought a son into the world. Then Mary appeared to her in the night when she lay in the bed alone, and said, "If you will tell the truth and confess that you unlocked the forbidden door, I will open your mouth and give you back your speech. But if you persevere in your sin and obstinately deny it, I will take your newborn child away with me."

Then the queen was permitted to answer, but her heart remained hard and she said, "No, I did not open the forbidden door." And Mary took the newborn child from her arms, and vanished with it.

Next morning, when the child was not to be found, it was whispered among the people that the queen was a witch and had put her own child to death. She heard all this and could say nothing to the contrary. But the king would not believe it, for he loved her very much.

When a year had gone by the queen again bore a son, and in the night Mary again came to her and said, "If you will confess that you opened the forbidden door, I will give you your child back and untie your tongue. But if you continue in your sin and deny it, I will take away with me this child also."

Then the queen said again, "No, I did not open the forbidden door."

Mary took the child out of her arms and took him away with her to Heaven. Next morning when it was found that this child had disappeared, the people declared quite loudly that the queen had devoured it, and the king's councilors demanded that she be brought to justice. The king, however, loved her so dearly that he would not believe it, and commanded the councilors under pain of death not to say anything more about it.

The following year the queen gave birth to a beautiful little daughter. For the third time Mary appeared to her in the night. She took the queen by the hand and led her to Heaven, and showed her there her two oldest children. They were playing with the ball of the world and looked up and smiled at her. The queen rejoiced at this, and Mary said, "Is your heart not yet softened? If you will confess that you opened the forbidden door, I will give you back your two little sons."

But for the third time the queen answered, "No, I did not open the forbidden door."

Then Mary let her sink down to earth once more, and took from her also her third child.

Next morning when the loss was reported abroad, all the people cried loudly, "The queen is a witch for she has devoured her own children—she must be judged!" and the king was no longer able to restrain his councilors. So a trial was held, and since she could not answer and defend herself, she was condemned to be burned at the stake. The wood was collected and piled around her. When she was bound fast to the stake and the fire began to burn round about her, the hard ice of pride melted. Her heart was moved by repentance, and she thought, "If I could only confess that I opened the door before my death."

Then her voice came back to her, and she cried out loudly, "Yes, Mary, I did it!"

Straight away rain fell from the sky and extinguished the flames. A light broke forth above her, and Mary descended with the two little sons by her side, and the new-born daughter in her arms.

She spoke kindly to her and said, "He who repents of his sin and acknowledges it, is forgiven." Then she gave her the three children, untied her tongue, and granted her happiness for her whole life.

TIPP AND HIS LIGHT

As Told By J. Heinrich Arnold

In actual fact his name was Edward, but he was a ten-year-old boy, and everyone called him Tipp. Tipp came from a poor family, and he was the meanest boy in the school. He liked to tease the other children and make things difficult for the teacher by disrupting the class. He led other boys to be rude to teachers and to the girls in the classroom. He would tease the girls until they wept. Tipp was tall and strong for his age, so the other boys respected him. Often the teacher worked hard to make something special or bring something important to the children, but Tipp always made a disturbance and spoiled it.

Tipp was especially nasty to a little girl called Louisa who had no mother. Once when he had broken a window, he lied to the teacher and said Louisa had done it. Then he laughed when the teacher scolded Louisa. When the teacher's pencil disappeared from her desk, he blamed it on Charles, a small, quiet boy who cried when the teacher scolded him.

When the school children gathered for music time, Tipp made fun of the boys who liked to sing, so none of the children could enjoy singing anymore. He also joked about the children who spoke of Christmas, of the Christ Child and the angels. He told them, "There are no angels!" Some did not dare to speak about angels anymore, because Tipp laughed about it in such a spiteful way. At heart, Tipp was actually a very unhappy child, and this made him destroy the happiness of other children.

Tipp had one sister, Hannah, who was nine years old. He did not like her, and she did not like him. He was always mean to her. Even when it was Hannah's birthday, Tipp spoiled the little bit of joy she had by breaking the doll that was her present.

But Tipp was not completely bad. Deep in his heart, he longed for love and wanted to be good. One day, not long before Christmas, Tipp was walking alone through the woods and thinking how miserable his life was. No one loved him and he loved no one. He felt very alone. His parents were very poor, and both had to work all day. Father worked in a factory, and Mother had to wash laundry for wealthy families. They came home from work very tired, and had only angry words for Tipp. In return, he was disobedient to them.

It was very difficult at home. Everything was dirty. The dishes were never done. The beds were never made. When she came home, his mother was too sad and too tired to do more work. And they hardly had enough food to eat.

While Tipp walked sadly through the woods, he suddenly remembered that he had once heard of God and of Jesus. Then he began to think about God. "If it is really true that God loves children, then he also loves me." He remembered that the teacher in school had told them that Jesus healed people. Tipp felt that his heart was sick, and he thought, "If it is true that Jesus heals, maybe he could heal my heart." He suddenly felt a great longing to pray to God and to Jesus on his knees. He did not know how to pray, but he went on his knees in the woods and said, "Dear God in Heaven, I want to find you and I want to love you. I believe that Jesus can heal my heart. I want to love Jesus. Lord Jesus, help me."

All at once, Tipp felt a deep joy coming into his heart. It was actually the Jesus-Spirit who came to him and found his heart. And the Jesus-Spirit told him that Jesus had died on the Cross out of love to all men.

Tipp wept, but not because he was sad: he knew he was full of joy. He had never been so joyful in his life. Oh, how much did he love Jesus now!

When he came home, he saw the dirty kitchen and thought it would be nice to do the dishes. After he had finished the dishes, he wondered what else he could do, and decided to make a cup of coffee for his sister Hannah. He had never said a friendly word to her before. She was very surprised when she came home, and very pleased. Tipp told her about Jesus and that Jesus had also died for her. Then she also began to feel the Jesus-Spirit. They both were so inspired, now that the table was clean, that Hannah swept the floor and Tipp suggested that they make everything beautiful as a surprise for their mother. They made some coffee, found some bread and jam, and made it as nice as they could. Once they started to make the kitchen tidy, they found more and more dirty corners, and they brushed and scrubbed until the kitchen really shone.

Then their mother came home. She entered the room tired and upset. But when she saw what had happened to the kitchen, she could not believe her eyes. An amazed smile came to her face. She sat down at the table and enjoyed a cup of hot coffee and some bread and jam, and the children were very loving to her. She was so surprised at them! For the first time, she realized that she had loving children and that she actually loved them. So then she said, "Let's make it nice for Father when he comes home." She went out to the store and bought something for their father and made a good supper. Their father entered in a bad mood, and very tired. Suddenly he looked around, and when he saw the table all set for supper and the loving eyes of his wife and children, he said, "This is the first time that I have enjoyed coming home." Then they had supper together, and Tipp told his father and mother what Jesus had done to his heart.

All the boys at school had respected Tipp because he was so strong and so mean. But the next day Tipp came to school very differently.

Wherever he could, he gave joy to someone. He helped the teacher to make the classroom tidy. At recess he gathered the boys and told them how he had walked through the woods and how sick at heart he had felt, and how Jesus had come and healed him. Some of the boys laughed at him. Some of the boys were very quiet. But Tipp did not mind if they laughed at him. He had Jesus.

When he came home from school he had much work to do. As well as his homework, he wanted to make things nice for his sister, and for his father and mother, and read in the Bible. He had found an old, old Bible in the attic. He did not know where to start, but he opened it and read, "If someone hits you on the one cheek, then turn the other cheek to him." He had to think a long time about this, and then he felt in his heart, "That is how Jesus was." Tipp had really found a light, and this light was Jesus. And Hannah had found the same light. They read together in the Bible, and they invited other children into their home and sang with them and read to them.

One day they were together with a group of children, and Tipp read in the Bible:

Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made to each as any had need. Acts 4:32–35

The children spoke about that for a long time. They thought, "What does all that mean?" And they wondered why they never saw people doing what was written in the Bible. They did not understand it all, but

someone explained to them that the early Christians loved one another so much that they could not own anything, but shared all they had. Tipp and Hannah made up their minds to seek and try to find such people, with the help of Jesus. They also wanted to share everything.

Time passed, and Tipp grew up. He had to leave school and go into the factory where his father worked, to help earn money so that they would have enough food and clothing. But Tipp and Hannah both kept looking for a way to follow Jesus completely, to share everything and to have full community. Tipp was quite sure in his heart that Jesus wanted this of him and Hannah, and they prayed every evening about it.

THE PAIR OF SHOES

By Aline Glasow

Once long ago in a small house in the town of Gebernye in the country of Poland there lived a mother, a father, three children, four chickens, and a cow. But in this house there was only one pair of shoes.

Sara Rebecca, the mother, was thin, with worried eyes and yellow hair drawn into a knot. She did her work silently, moving through the house like a shadow. Sara Rebecca did not wear the pair of shoes. When she went to market, and even when she went to synagogue on Saturday, she wore always her pair of worn *pontussel*.

The father, Avrum, was a sickly man. His face was long and bony, and his black beard came down to his second shirt button. It was hard for the children to tell when their father was smiling at them, for his beard covered most of his mouth. So they looked not at his mouth, but at his eyes, and usually the eyes of Avrum were half-closed in prayer. Since Avrum could not walk, he had no need of the pair of shoes. He wore only slippers on his crippled feet.

The house was separated into two rooms by a wide, heavy curtain. Both rooms were kept very clean, for the daughter, Dubbie, helped the mother. She swept, she scrubbed, she washed the dishes, and she made the beds. Each morning, too, it was her special task to polish the mother's one remaining treasure, the copper samovar, until it shone like a single candle in the poor bare home. Because she was the youngest,

Dubbie had not yet used the pair of shoes. She walked on the hard-packed dirt floor in her bare feet.

Each morning the younger brother, Noah, fed the four chickens with the few crumbs left from the table. He scooped up the warm, dusty eggs from the small coop beneath the great stove. He helped the mother in her vegetable garden and he took care of Olga, his beloved cow. For his work Noah did not need the pair of shoes. But increasingly, as he grew older, he needed them when he went to the rabbi for his studies.

It was the eldest, Jacob, who wore the pair of shoes most of the time. Jacob was almost thirteen, and he wore the pair of shoes when he went to the rabbi, when he went to the synagogue, and when he went into town to work at whatever odd jobs he could find.

When the shoes were new, they had been quite elegant, with eight shiny pearl buttons and a gray fur lining. They had belonged to Avrum, and he had worn them with pride. But that was long ago, before the accident had crippled him.

Today, years later, the family no longer spoke of the accident that had taken from them a father young and strong and had left to them a father crippled, brooding, and helpless. Only Avrum himself, once in a long while, would look at his wife and his daughter and his two sons, piercing them with his heavy, thoughtful eyes and saying, "The ways of the Lord are inscrutable. The accident which I thought would ruin my life has given to me my greatest joy. It took from me the use of my legs, but it gave to me my holy books."

And to the children it bequeathed his pair of shoes. They were old shoes now, high and black and covered with the deep creases of age, but they were warm shoes, and when Jacob polished them and shined the pearl buttons, it seemed to the three children that they were the handsomest shoes in all the world.

One night as Jacob sat lovingly rubbing the pairs of shoes with his cloth, the father looked up from his books. For a moment his prayers

ceased. Through veiled eyes he stared at his elder son. Then softly he asked, "Why is it, my son, that you rub the shoes so hard and so long?"

The boy looked away. In a hoarse voice he muttered, "Because a man is not a man unless he walks in shoes!"

The father's pale fingers plucked delicately at the fringes of his long tallis. "This is your belief?" he asked slowly.

Almost defiantly the boy replied, "This is my belief."

The father did not answer. In a moment the sound of his prayers hovered again above the small room like a circle of endless song. Bending his head, Jacob returned to his pair of shoes.

Later that night while the children slept—Dubbie and Noah huddled together on the wooden bed that stood in the corner, and Jacob, the eldest, curled alone upon the shelf above the great brick stove—the mother sat down at last with the father and carefully poured the tea from her gleaming samovar.

"Avrum?" She sighed. "How swiftly the years have fled...and now, here is our eldest, almost a man. It is hard to believe that on the third Sabbath we will celebrate his Bar Mitzvah."

The father sipped his glass of tea silently.

The mother looked down. She clasped her hands together. Then she leaned across the table toward the father, and in a low voice she whispered, "What are we to do, Avrum? The boy must have the pair of shoes for his own! It cannot be put off any longer!"

The room was very still now. Outside a wind had begun to moan across the brown countryside. The candlelight threw long, bearded shadows against the whitewashed walls.

"It can wait," said the father.

"Until when? Until when can it wait?"

The father looked up at his son who lay still and sleeping above the stove. The long limbs stretched beneath the patched blanket. The big

feet stuck out. And the first fine dark hair shone above the upper lip. "Until he has truly become a man," he replied, and for a moment he smiled with his brooding eyes.

On the very next morning the little sister came to the mother. "There are only four candles for the Friday night holy service," said Dubbie.

Sara Rebecca looked up from the stove. "Ai," she sighed, "it will be a good warm loaf of bread! And you shall have a piece as soon as you return from the town. See!" she cried, digging into the pocket of her apron. "See how lucky you are! I have found a kopeck for the candle! Now wrap your feet, for it's cold out!"

Dubbie looked at her mother. "No, Mama," she said, shaking her head back and forth. "I don't want to wrap my feet. Today I want to wear the pair of shoes!"

"The pair of shoes!" whispered the mother.

Dubbie looked down at her bare feet. "I am nine years old," she replied quietly. "I am too old to go into town without shoes any longer."

The mother did not answer. Instead she turned to Jacob.

"Jacob," she whispered, glancing anxiously toward the father, who sat, as always, bent over his holy book, "perhaps this morning you will not go to the town? Try instead to find work in one of the orchards."

"Why?" asked the boy.

"Because," replied the mother, "this morning your little sister needs the pair of shoes."

The older boy glared at his mother. "Why does she need them? She is too small to wear shoes yet. Besides, she is a girl."

The mother looked at the boy, her eldest, and she replied, "She needs them."

The father lifted his eyes slowly from his Talmud. He stared at his son. Then he returned to his prayers.

Jacob stood up. He took the shoes from the wooden box in which he kept them, and he handed them to his mother. Without another word he walked out of the house.

Sara Rebecca looked down at the pair of shoes. "Such small feet, bebele, and such big shoes!" Swiftly she began to stuff rags into the wide toes.

Holding her breath, Dubbie slipped her feet into the pair of shoes. The mother laced the strings tightly around the eight pearl buttons. The little girl stood up. Her eyes shone as she exclaimed, "Mama! See how beautiful they look!"

"Shh," whispered Sara Rebecca, glancing again toward the table. "Come outside."

Once outside, the mother burst into tears and hugged her daughter to her bosom.

"Why are you crying?" asked the little girl.

Wiping her eyes on her apron, the mother said, "Here is the kopeck. Go to the market and purchase the candle. Then come right home, for Noah must go to the rabbi for his lesson in the afternoon. He will need the pair of shoes."

She wrapped the kopeck in a small rag and put it into the pocket of Dubbie's apron. Then she straightened and turned toward Jacob, who stood staring sullenly into the stone well that the father had built years before.

"Won't you say 'good journey' to your little sister, Jacob?" she called.

The boy did not answer. Kicking at a stone, he turned and walked back into the house.

The mother sighed. "Good-bye," she called to her daughter. "Remember, if the shoes get too heavy, take them off and carry them."

With a smile Dubbie waved to her mother and started down the dusty road, slowly and clumsily, disappearing at last around the bend.

For a long while the mother stood by the door, staring after her. Suddenly a loud voice coming from the house made her start. She turned and walked inside.

Jacob stood facing his father, his cheeks pale with anger.

"But I will have them!" he cried, "I am no longer a child. The second Sabbath after this one coming will be the day of my Bar Mitzvah. Soon I will be apprenticed and then it is I who will bring bread into this house."

"Ai!" cried the mother, rushing at her son. "Bite your tongue!"

The boy turned now to face his mother. "But why can't I have my own shoes? How am I to become a man if I cannot walk in my own pair of shoes?"

The father said never a word, and only buried himself more deeply in his Bible and his Talmud and his other books, mumbling his incessant prayers.

"Bite your tongue, Jacob!" cried the mother. "Beg your father for his forgiveness!"

The boy turned away. "I will not beg my father," muttered the boy, and he left the room.

In the shed Noah sat milking Olga. The sweet strong smell of hay filled the air. The flies were busy in the morning sunlight as Olga's tail swept slowly back and forth.

"It will be a good day, Olga," Noah whispered to his friend. "Today I will brush you and clean you and give you a special grain that Semyon saved for me. You have never tasted such a grain!"

The cow tossed her head, pressing her side gently against Noah's arm. Noah hummed and bent lower over his milk pail.

Suddenly he turned and saw Jacob glaring at him. Without a word the older boy threw himself down upon the sticky hay. Nothing was heard but the quick splash of the white milk as it flowed from Olga into the wooden pail.

“Good girl. Just a little more now,” soothed Noah.

Jacob laughed bitterly. “How can you love a cow so?” he asked. “Have you no other friend besides this foolish animal?”

“What is wrong with loving an animal?” cried Noah. “Besides, I have a friend. Semyon is my friend.”

“Yes,” cried Jacob, leaping to his feet, “and today he will call for you to go to the rabbi, and you will wear my shoes, hey?”

Noah stood up. “They are not your shoes,” he said.

“They are mine!” shouted the older boy.

“They are not yours. They were given to all three of us by our father. Don’t you remember?” Noah picked up the pail of foaming milk and left the shed, and Jacob flung himself down upon the hay once again, his dark eyes filled with burning unshed tears.

Later in the day Sara Rebecca called her family to the afternoon meal of hot red borscht, cooked from the beets of her small garden, and potatoes, also from her garden.

“Ai,” she sighed, as she sat down at the silent table. “Dubbie should have been home long ago.”

When the meal was over and Noah’s friend Semyon arrived, the younger boy turned to his mother. “How can I go to the rabbi for my lesson?” he asked. “Dubbie is not yet home with the pair of shoes.”

Jacob stood up from the table, his eyes fixed upon the dirt floor. “I will look for her up the road,” he said. Without waiting for an answer, he ran out of the house.

It was only a short while after, as the mother was clearing away the dishes and pouring the boiling tea for the father, that Jacob returned. Dubbie was in his arms.

“See, Mama,” cried the little girl, her words tumbling between laughter and tears. “I didn’t drop the candle. But isn’t it silly? I twisted my ankle!” She continued quickly in a high, thin voice, “It was a stone in the road that made me fall, Mama...not the shoes.”

Jacob laid his sister upon her bed, taking off the heavy shoes with great care. Noah gave her a fresh glass of milk. The mother wrapped a hot towel around her ankle. Even the father stopped his prayers and was brought to sit beside her.

For a long while Dubbie tossed. It was not until much later, when the afternoon sun had gone, that she fell at last into a restless sleep.

All through that troubled night the mother and father sat by the little girl. They spoke to her soothingly. They held her close. The father prayed. But in the morning she was no better. The ankle was swollen and red.

“Ai, Mama!” cried the feverish girl. “How my foot aches!”

The mother stood up. She turned to her eldest son. “You must fetch the doctor from the town,” she said.

Jacob, who was almost a grown man, asked quickly, “With what will we pay the doctor?”

And Noah, who was still a boy, said slowly, “We could sell Olga.”

The mother shook her head. “No,” she said, “we will not sell Olga. How can we sell a dear friend? We will sell the samovar.”

Everyone grew quiet. Even Dubbie stopped her ceaseless turning to stare at the mother as she carefully lifted the shining samovar from its place of honor in the center of the table. “For a long time Semyon’s mother has admired my samovar,” she said. “I know she will buy it. Take it to her, Jacob, and then go to Doctor Raikov in Gebernye.”

Jacob put on the pair of shoes and took the samovar from his mother. In a moment he was gone.

All during that long morning, while the mother tended to her work, the father did not stir from his daughter’s bedside. The gaunt, silent man sat bent over the little girl, softly stroking her moist hair.

“I will read you a story from the Bible,” he said hesitantly once in a low voice.

"No," whispered the child. "I am too tired..."

She tossed, fell into a short sleep, then started up, crying and mumbling strange mixed words. Once, toward the end of the morning, she sat up suddenly and smiled at Noah. "I would like to see Olga," she cried. "I love Olga. I love her milk." Then she fell back upon her pillow and into a feverish sleep.

"Go," said the mother to Noah, "go and bring Olga from the shed."

And so later, when Jacob arrived in the doctor's droshky, he led the doctor into a small dark room in which a little girl lay on an old wooden bed, surrounded by a mother, a father, a brother, and a cow.

The doctor bent over his patient, pressing the hot swollen ankle with his firm hands. "The ankle is fractured," he said at last. "It will have to be set immediately or the leg will not grow right."

With skilled hands he set to work. The mother and Noah cried when they heard the little girl's screams, but the father and Jacob, though red-eyed, remained silent. Even Olga grew restless, as if she, too, understood.

After a long while the doctor spoke. "She will sleep now," he said. "I have given her something to make her rest." He stood up.

Sara Rebecca rose heavily. "Thank you, Doctor," she said. "Please, before you leave, a cup of hot tea..." Remembering suddenly that her samovar was gone, the mother turned toward the table. Then, in the next instant, she saw the beautiful copper samovar once more in its place of honor and her sobs filled the room.

The doctor turned toward the father. Pale and drawn, Avrum looked away. In a strained voice he said, "Thank you, Doctor, for our daughter." Then he looked at Jacob.

Quickly the boy drew two paper rubles from his pocket and handed them to the doctor.

"Thank you," said the doctor. "There, there, Mother, don't cry. In a month's time your little girl will be running about the yard again. You will see!" In a moment he was gone, and the only sound that could be heard in the small room was that of Dubbie's slow, even breathing.

Filled with a great weariness, Sara Rebecca asked in a hollow voice, "Where did you get the money, Jacob? If you did not sell the samovar, where did you get the rubles?"

Strangely, unexpectedly, the father's voice rang in the silent room. "Look at the boy's feet, Sara!"

Fearfully the mother turned to look. Before her, upon the hard-packed dirt floor, stood her son, tall, defiant, and barefoot. Wrenched by an unbearable pain she whispered, "The pair of shoes..."

"I sold them, Mama!" Jacob exclaimed. He wheeled toward Noah, his eyes pleading.

For a moment Noah stared at his older brother, horrified. Then, solemnly, he nodded his head.

"But," cried the mother hoarsely, "you were told to sell the samovar!"

Jacob stared down at the floor. "I decided to sell the pair of shoes instead," he said.

"Was this for you to decide?" she asked.

The boy did not answer.

His heavy-lidded gaze measuring Jacob, the father asked, "How then, my son, will you walk to your Bar Mitzvah on the third Sabbath?"

After a pause the boy replied, "I will walk in my bare feet."

"But can a man walk without shoes and still be a man?" asked the father softly.

The boy looked down. "A man can walk without shoes and still be a man," he said.

The father spoke not another word but turned once more to his books. Jacob sat down next to his sleeping sister. Noah led Olga into

the shed. And Sara Rebecca, her eyes swollen, busied herself with the evening meal.

It was after the dishes had been cleared away and the mother was pouring the hot tea from the shining samovar that the father laughed. Dubbie, sitting up in bed now, her fever broken, looked at him in wonder. Never before had she heard her father laugh in this way.

Avrum turned to his elder son. "I have made a decision, Jacob," he said. From the pile of books that was always at his side he selected three, beautifully bound in gold.

"Tomorrow morning," he said, "you will go into Gebernye to the store of the money lender, and you will sell these three books. Noah will go with you. From there you will go to the cobbler. You will tell him to make one pair of shoes for yourself and one for your brother. The money from the third book will be used to buy our Dubbie a pair of shoes—the kind that is meant for a girl to wear—when she is better."

Not even a sigh could be heard in the room.

Jacob watched intently as a hen strutted across the floor. Noah sat unmoving. Dubbie began to cry. And the mother stared at her husband as at a stranger, someone she must learn again to know and to understand. Avrum, whose eyes had not left Jacob in all this time, smiled. "And on the Sabbath," he said firmly, "on the third Sabbath, my son, when you walk to your Bar Mitzvah, you will walk in your own pair of shoes."

Choosing each word with great care, Avrum turned to the mother. "The night before last, Sara, while the children slept, you asked me when Jacob would have his own pair of shoes." The mother lowered her eyes. The father continued. "It is said in the Talmud that there is a time for each boy to become a man. Now is the time for Jacob. Now he will have his own pair of shoes!"

"But how can you sell your holy books?" whispered the mother.

The father paused, "I learned something today," he said haltingly, "something I will never forget." He stopped, stretched his arms toward his family. Then, looking into each beloved face, he said, "And I did not learn it from my holy books. I learned it from my wife, my sons, and from my little daughter!"

Suddenly Jacob spoke. "I learned something, too," he said, a smile lighting his face. "And do you know...I learned it from an old, old pair of shoes!"

THE CHRISTMAS PRESENT

J. Heinrich Arnold

In a little village in the mountains, the people had the custom of giving a present to the whole village community each Christmas. These presents were meant for the Christ Child. For many weeks before Christmas, people considered what they should bring. Some brought clothing, others food. All these presents were then given to the poor of the village, for Jesus had said, "I assure you that whatever you have done for the humblest of my brothers, you have done for me."

Some people brought presents for the decoration of the community building. The shepherd had decided already in springtime which lamb would be his present. He looked after this lamb with special love and care until Christmas. Some gave sheep's wool as their present. The peasants gave grain or honey. The shoemaker made a pair of shoes. The black-smith made a special candlestick. The carpenter made a bench. The weaver wove a beautiful piece of cloth. The wise man who lived on the hill wrote a poem fitting for the great occasion. The violinist of the village practiced a special piece for Christmas Eve. The painter, who lived in a very little house down in the village, made a detailed picture of shepherds in the field. The grandmothers knitted warm socks for the children. Also the children each made a present. They drew pictures and made calendars and other things to bring as their gifts.

One man in the village had nothing as a present, nothing at all. His name was Ithar and he was a gypsy. He was a strange man. He had

wild eyes, and he was very strong, but he worked only when he was in need of food and shelter. Then he worked for the peasants. So he was very poor—he never possessed a nickel. His clothing was old and his shoes were in sad condition. The children feared this man. Since he looked so frightening, they always ran away when they saw him in the distance. No one loved him, because he was mostly quite unfriendly. He usually said very little and when he did say something, it sounded very hostile.

Christmastime had come again, and Ithar saw all the people preparing their presents, but he had nothing to give. And Ithar was ashamed, because he had prepared nothing. It was late on Christmas Eve when Ithar passed the main building of the village. The door was still a little open. Only a small oil lamp gave a little light to the big community room. Ithar went into the house and prayed. Then he began walking around the room, and he saw that near the fireplace, the people of the village had made a crib scene with many figures. He saw the shepherds in the field, the sheep, and the three kings. He saw that not only the kings brought presents, but even the shepherds brought little lambs to give to the Christ Child.

Then Ithar said, “Lord, I am very sad that I have prepared nothing to bring to you as a gift.” He heard the answer in his heart: “Ithar, Ithar, give me your heart.” He said, “How can I give you my heart? How shall I do it?” Ithar wanted to give his heart more than anything else, but he did not know how that was possible.

And again he heard a voice in his heart, “Ithar, if your heart is filled with love, then you will know that you have given your heart to me!”

Ithar got up and left the building and went out into the night. Outside he met an old woman. She was staggering under a heavy load of wood. She, too, was poor, and she had a cold room at home and wanted to make it light and warm for Christmas Eve.

“Let me carry your wood,” said Ithar. At first the old woman was afraid of Ithar, but when she looked into his eyes, she saw that they were full of goodness. Ithar carried the wood up the hill. When they came to her door, she said to him, “May peace come into your heart this night.”

Ithar went a little further, and found a man by the roadside, almost frozen with cold. This man was one of the homeless people of this earth. Ithar carried him to his house, put him on his straw mattress, and shared his supper with him. The man was soon asleep, and Ithar lay on the floor.

And then Ithar knew that he had given his heart to Jesus.

THE KEYS OF HEAVEN

Manfred Kyber

There once was a great and powerful king who ruled over many lands. Everyone believed the earth belonged to him, and each day he played with the gems of Ophir and the roses of Damascus. But he lacked one thing: in all his great riches he did not have the keys to the Gates of Heaven.

This king sent out a thousand messengers to look for the Keys of Heaven, but none could bring them to him. He asked the many wise men that visited his court where these keys could be found, but they could not tell him. Only one, a wise man from India, smiled and pushed aside the gems of Ophir and the roses of Damascus with which the king was playing. He said, "You can receive all the treasures of the earth as gifts, but the Keys of Heaven every man must find for himself."

At this, the king made up his mind that he would find the Keys of Heaven, cost what it may. Now all this happened at a time when men were still able to see where Heaven reached down to earth, and they knew the high mountain at whose summit the Gates of Heaven were built. The king left all his courtiers behind and climbed the steep mountain, up, up to the Gates of Heaven. Before the gates, whose pinnacles were flooded in sunlight, stood the angel Gabriel, the protector of God's eternal Garden.

"Oh holy one!" the king said, "I have all the treasures of the earth. Many lands are under my rule, and I play with the gems of Ophir and

the roses of Damascus. But I will have no peace until I can also find the Keys of Heaven. For how else shall these golden gates open for me one day?"

"You are right," the angel Gabriel said. "Without the Keys of Heaven you cannot open the gates, even if you have all the treasures of the earth. But the Keys of Heaven can be found. They bloom as small flowers when springtime comes to the earth and to the souls of all created things."

"What?" asked the king in amazement. "I need to do nothing more than find this small flower and pick it? The woods and meadows are so full of them that they are trodden underfoot."

"It is true that men tread over the Keys of Heaven," said the angel, "But it is not as easy to find them as you think. There are only three Keys of Heaven that will open the gates to you, and all three are only the right Keys when they open for you at your feet. The thousands of other flowers that men tread beneath their feet are only reminders to them to bring the real Keys of Heaven to bloom."

At that moment a child came before the Gate of Heaven. The child held three small Keys of Heaven, and the flowers blossomed and glowed in his hand. As soon as the child touched the Gates of Heaven with his three flowers, they opened wide for him. The angel Gabriel led the child into Heaven, and the gates closed behind them. The king remained alone before the locked gates. Then he went thoughtfully down the mountain to earth, and everywhere he saw meadows and woods filled with the most beautiful Keys of Heaven. The king was careful not to step on them, but none of the flowers opened at his feet.

He asked himself, "How is it that I cannot find the right Keys of Heaven, when a mere child has managed?" But he did not find them, and many years passed.

As he rode out into the countryside one day with all his men, a small, dirty orphan child came up to his glittering company and begged him for help.

“Let her go on begging!” said his courtiers, and shoved the girl to the side. But the king had been thinking about the Keys of Heaven over the many years since he had climbed the steep mountainside, and he had never trodden on a single flower. Now he lifted up the beggar child, set her before him on his horse and brought her home. He had her fed and washed, and he dressed her in fine clothes and put a crown on her head.

And there, at his feet bloomed a golden flower, the Keys of Heaven. Amazed by this wonder, the king proclaimed that all the poor and the children in his kingdom were his brothers.

Again many years passed, and the king was riding through the wood with his courtiers. Under the trees he found an injured wolf; it lay on its side and could not get up.

“Let it die!” said his attendants and they set themselves between him and the poor animal.

But the king lifted the sick wolf and carried it in his arms to his palace. He himself nursed the creature back to health and from that time on the wolf never left his side. And a second golden flower bloomed at his feet. So the king proclaimed that all animals in his kingdom were also his brothers.

Again many years passed, and the king was walking through the palace garden, enjoying all the rare plants that made it the loveliest garden in all lands. At the edge of the path, the king saw a small, unsightly plant. It was wilting in the heat and its leaves were covered with dust. “I will bring it some water,” said the king.

The gardener protested, “It is a weed. I will pull it up and burn it. It does not belong in the kingly garden with all these glorious flowers.”

But the king took his golden helmet, filled it with water and brought it to the plant, and the plant drank and began to live again.

And immediately there bloomed the third Keys of Heaven at the feet of the king, and the beggar child and the wolf stood beside him. As the king looked up, he saw that high on the steep mountain, the Gates of Heaven stood wide, wide open. In the flood of sunlight around the portals stood the angel Gabriel and the small child who had entered the Kingdom of Heaven those many years ago. And the king knew that at last the Gates of Heaven were open for him.

The Keys of Heaven still bloom today, and even now they shine brighter than the gems of Ophir and the roses of Damascus.

THE DANCE OF ROBBER HORRIFICUS

Karl Heinrich Waggerl

Towards evening, after having rested well, Joseph and Mary wanted to travel on to Egypt. But Joseph took the donkey and rode on ahead over a little hill to inquire about the way. “It can’t be far to Egypt now,” he thought.

In the meantime, Mary waited under a group of palm trees, with the child on her lap. And then it happened that a certain Horrificus came their way, known far and wide as the most terrible robber in the whole desert.

The grass lay flat on the ground before him, the palm trees shivered and threw down their dates into his hat, and even the strongest lion tucked his tail between his legs when he saw the robber’s red trousers in the distance.

He had seven daggers on his belt, each one so sharp that he could cut the wind with it. On his left side hung his saber, and on his shoulder he carried a club fitted with scorpions’ tails.

“Ha!” roared the robber, pulling his saber.

“Good evening,” said Mary. “Not so loud, please; the baby is sleeping.”

This took the robber’s breath away. In his embarrassment, he clipped off the top of a thistle with his sword. “I am the robber Horrificus,” he snarled. “I have done many terrible deeds...”

“May God forgive you!” Mary said.

“Let me finish!” cried the robber in a hoarse whisper. “And now I am going to take your child away!”

“That is very bad,” said Mary, “but what’s worse is that you are lying!”

At this moment a chuckling could be heard in a nearby bush, and the robber jumped straight into the air with shock. Never before had anyone dared to laugh in his presence. It was only the little angels who had been traveling with the baby. At first they had fled away, but now they were sitting together in the low branches, to see what would happen.

“Are you not afraid of me?” asked the robber in a small voice.

“Oh, Brother Horrificus,” Mary said, “what a funny man you are!”

To be called brother! That went to the robber’s heart, because, to tell the truth, his heart was as soft as wax. You see, when he was still a baby, people had already come to peek at him and said, “Woe to us! Doesn’t he look like a robber?” And as he grew older, they all ran the other way and dropped everything they had, as soon as they saw him coming. So Horrificus lived fairly well, and gained a dreadful reputation although he could never take anything from anyone, let alone hurt them. And so it felt very good to this terrible robber that he had finally found someone who was not afraid of him.

After pausing a moment to gather his wits, he said, “I would like to give your little boy a present, but I have only stolen goods in my pocket. So if it pleases you, I would like to dance for him!”

And the robber Horrificus danced, the likes of which no living being has ever seen before. He lifted his sword over his head, and he swung his legs this way and that, as gracefully as an antelope, and so fast that one couldn’t count them anymore. He tossed the seven daggers into the air and jumped through the wind as it was cut into pieces, and like a

tongue of flame he whirled back down to earth again.

So skillfully the robber danced, so magnificent was he to watch with his earrings, his embroidered belt and the beautiful feathers in his hat, that Mother Mary's eyes began to shine. Even the animals from the desert came creeping up to see. The kingly rattlesnake, the kangaroo rat, and the jackal all stood around in a circle and beat out the rhythm on the sand with their tails. Finally the robber sank exhausted at Mary's feet and promptly fell asleep.

When he finally woke up, Joseph and Mary had long since traveled on, and he went on his way in a daze. But soon he noticed that nobody was afraid of him anymore. They came right up to him to say hello.

"He has a soft heart!" the kangaroo rat told everyone.

"He danced for the little child," hissed the rattlesnake.

So Horrificus remained in the desert. He laid down his terrible name and became a loving friend to all.

THE DRAGON AND THE COFFEE POT

Manfred Kyber

In a large, deep forest a long time ago, there live a terrible dragon. He spat poison and he breathed fire from the holes in his nose. He ate men and animals in a way that was sad to see. Dragons are most unfriendly beings who spit poison and eat men and animals. Because of all this, we should not be too surprised that this dragon did the same, for he had no better education than this—and the education of a dragon is not sufficient for a decent life.

It surely was not nice to see him sitting there in the forest eating everything that came into his way. He only left the bones. He actually spat them out and left them lying around the place in a most disorderly fashion. It was a miserable sight and the people of the area were not at all satisfied with the situation.

One day, a little girl went into this forest to find some berries. The search for the wonderful berries led her deeper and deeper into the forest. It was already quite late by the time the girl noticed that she should have been home a long time ago. The darkness was already creeping in, and the trees had long, dark shadows. Far away, the girl could hear the church bell of her village. She really had a shock. She was only a very little girl, and she decided to go home fast. She knew that the shortest way would lead her past the home of the dragon. She thought she had to take the shortest way because night was coming fast, and she was afraid of the darkness.

The little girl knew that her parents were waiting at home and that her mother would be very worried about her. That is why she decided to go the shortest way. She asked her guardian angel to protect her when she passed near the home of the dragon. She had only just thought of her guardian angel when he already stood next to her.

“Good evening,” he said, “the way you go is the path on which the dragon sits.”

“I know, I know,” said the little girl. “I also know that he is unfriendly and that he eats men and animals, that he spits poison, and that he breathes fire. All this is not nice, but I have to go this way, otherwise I will come home too late. I thought you would protect me in any case.”

“This I will do,” said the angel, “and I will watch over you, and the dragon will not be able to do harm to you. But you will see him, if you go this way, and it will be a horrible and shocking sight. Because of this I would prefer it if you would choose a different way.”

“I would like to be home before dark, and since you will protect me, it will be all right,” said the little girl. “Perhaps the dragon went for a little walk, and perhaps he is not at home. Then I would not even see him.”

“So many people who walk on the road of the dragon say the same thing,” said the angel, “but the dragon has not gone for a walk. He sits where he always sits, and if you go this way against my advice, then you will see him.”

“That is not nice,” said the little girl, “what shall I do?”

“You must think of your angel, and you should have no fear,” said the angel. “Look here, little child, men should never fear the dragons. If men would have no fear, then the dragons become quite small. Then it does not help them a bit that they spit poison and breathe fire.”

“I will try to do that. I will think of you, and I will have no fear,” said the little girl.

And that is how she walked into the darkness of the forest. The angel disappeared, and the girl felt quite alone. In reality, the angel never left the girl, but she could not see him anymore. It did not take very long before the little girl heard a coughing and a blowing of the nose going on in a most impolite manner.

It was the dragon who spat poison and breathed fire. When the little girl came around the corner, she saw the dragon sitting there on the ground. He was constantly hitting the ground with his ugly tail. On his short clumsy feet were long claws. He was busy just spitting poison and breathing fire, which came out of the holes of his nose. Around the dragon were strewn the bones of many animals. This surely looked disorderly and most distasteful.

The little girl had a shock, but she thought of the angel and tried not to have fear—but it did not seem to work so well.

“It is not nice, the way you behave,” said the little girl. “Let me pass by.”

“I will not let you pass,” said the dragon, and he lay down directly in the path which the girl had to take.

“I will talk with him a little,” thought the girl. “Perhaps he will become more reasonable and allow me to pass by. He cannot harm me anyway, because my angel told me so.”

“Tell me, why do you eat people?” asked the little girl. “Do you think that is good manners? Or is it nice if everyone fears you? Can’t you eat potato soup? You would only need to put the soup pot on one of the holes in your nose, and the soup would be ready in half an hour. You don’t even have to do the work we do to cook our soup.”

“Potato soup?” asked the dragon. And he smiled in a very distasteful way, for in smiling he showed his teeth. Just one of his teeth would have been enough to scare a strong man. Potato soup had never been offered to that dragon before.

“Yes, potato soup,” said the little girl. “Potato soup is something fine. It is a sign of poor upbringing that you don’t like it. You can also drink coffee and have my cookies. I still have coffee in my jug and cookies in my basket. I’ll put both here and you can have them. But you have to let me pass by.”

“I will eat you,” said the dragon.

“Under no circumstances,” said the little girl. “You cannot do this because my angel will not give you permission.”

“I will not ask your angel,” said the dragon.

“Maybe he won’t ask the angel after all,” thought the little girl, and fear came over her.

“Look how I can flap my wings,” said the dragon. “I’ll take you into the air.”

“You surely cannot fly,” said the little girl. “To be able to fly you really would have to be a bird or an angel. You do not have real wings. Your wings are short, and they’re not even beautiful.”

The dragon did not like this at all, because dragons want to be respected. They cannot laugh about themselves. He looked with horrible eyes at the little girl. The little girl’s heart was beating like a hammer, but she did not want to be afraid because the angel had told her not to.

“Look how I can use my haunches,” said the dragon. “I only need to make one jump, and I’ll have you.”

“That would be a sign of poor upbringing,” said the girl, but she put her hands on her heart and called for her angel.

Suddenly the angel appeared, and around him were many other angels. They did not allow the dragon to come close to the girl. The girl no longer had any fear at all, and suddenly it seemed as if the dragon became smaller and smaller.

“You with your short clumsy legs of a dachshund,” said the girl, “you’re uneducated! Don’t you see the angels around me? How will you

be able to come close to me? Drink the coffee and eat the cookies and learn to behave properly.”

When the little girl had said this, the angels disappeared, and the forest became quite dark. The dragon, however, had become quite small. He had put the coffee pot on his nose to warm the coffee a little. He almost looked like a little dachshund, and the girl had a good laugh.

“Do you like it?” the girl asked the dragon. For the coffee had begun to boil and steam on the nose of the dragon. The dragon had a good warm meal. The girl took the coffee pot, said good night, and went home.

The bells of the church were still ringing because it had only been a short time that the girl was with the dragon. This is always true when we experience something great.

From that time on, both people and animals were saved from that dragon. He remained as small as a dachshund and he lived on potato soup.

THERE ARE MANY ROADS in life that lead close to a dangerous dragon. It is of greatest importance at such times to think of our guardian angels. Then the most dangerous dragon becomes quite small, like a little dog, and eats only potato soup.

HEAVEN AND HELL

Richard von Volkmann Leander

It was the time of year when the world is most beautiful and when it is hardest for people to leave this earth. The lilacs were in full bloom, and the buds on the rose bushes were ready to burst. Two travelers walked along the path to heaven. One was rich, the other poor. On earth they had lived quite close to each other, on the same street—the rich man in a huge, magnificent villa, the poor man in a little hut. Since death is not a respecter of persons, it so happened that both died in the same hour. They met on the road to heaven and walked along silently, side by side.

The way became steeper and steeper. It was soon quite difficult for the rich man to climb because he was stout and short of breath. He had never walked this far in all his life. So it happened that the poor man got ahead and arrived at the gates of heaven first. He didn't dare knock. He sat down in front of the gates and thought to himself, "I'll just wait for the rich man; perhaps he will knock."

After a long time the rich man arrived too. When he found the gates closed and no one running out to open them and welcome him, he began to rattle the gates and hammer on them with his fists. St. Peter rushed out, flung the gates open, looked the two men over, and said to the rich man, "That must have been you who couldn't wait. I don't think you need to consider yourself so important. Things we've heard about you up here haven't been too impressive so far; in fact, your doings on earth didn't make much sense to us."

The rich man's courage dropped into his boots, but St. Peter didn't give him another thought. He stretched out his hand to the poor man to help him up, and said, "Come into the hall, both of you, and we will see what is to happen next."

Sure enough, the place they entered wasn't heaven yet. It was a great, wide hall with many locked doors and benches along the walls.

"Rest a little," Peter said to the two travelers. "Wait until I return, but use your time well to decide what you wish to do up here. Each of you shall have exactly what he wishes; therefore, consider it well. When I return, don't start humming and hawing, but tell me straight out. Don't forget anything; afterwards it will be too late."

Peter left. After a time he reappeared and asked if they had finished their considerations and decided how they wished to spend their time in Eternity. The rich man leaped from his bench and said he wanted a grand, golden palace, more beautiful than the Emperor's palace and each day the best of food: hot chocolate in the morning, for lunch, roast veal with apple sauce every day, and creamy rice with smoked sausages and raspberry delight for dessert. These were his favorite dishes. For the evening meal he would like something different each day. Could he also have a very comfortable grandfather chair and a green silk dressing gown? And Peter should not forget the daily paper so that he could keep up with the news.

Peter looked at him with compassion, stood silent a while, and finally asked, "Don't you wish for anything else?"

"Oh yes!" the rich man added quickly, "lots and lots of money! All the cellars should be filled! So much that one cannot count it!"

"You shall have it," Peter replied. "Follow me." He opened one of the many doors and led the rich man into a magnificent, golden palace. It was exactly as the rich man had wished it to be. After Peter had shown him everything, he left and locked the palace gate behind him with a huge iron bolt.

The rich man put on the green silk dressing gown, sat himself down in his cozy armchair, ate and drank and enjoyed himself, and then read the daily newspaper. Once a day he climbed down the steps to look at his money bags in the cellar.

Fifty years passed by and then another fifty—that is a hundred years. Now a hundred years is a very small fragment of Eternity, but the rich man was already so fed up with his gorgeous, golden palace, that he could hardly stand it any longer.

“Those veal cutlets get worse every day, and the fried sausages too,” he said. “They have lost all their flavor.” This wasn’t true. The trouble was, he had had too many of them. “I haven’t read the daily paper for ages,” he mumbled. “I don’t care what happens on the earth. I don’t even know anyone down there anymore. All my acquaintances have died long ago. The people who have to live on earth now play such stupid pranks and talk such queer nonsense that you get quite dizzy reading about it.”

Then he was silent and yawned, because it was all very boring. A little time passed, and then he grumbled, “I don’t even know what to do with all my money. You can’t buy anything here! How could anyone be so stupid as to wish for money in heaven!” He got up, opened the window, and looked out.

All the rooms of the castle were brightly lit, but it was absolutely pitch-black dark outside, so pitch black that you could not see your hand in front of your eyes—inky black by day and night, from one year to the next, and as silent as a church yard. He closed the window and sat down once more in his cozy grandfather chair. Once or twice each day he arose and looked out of the window. But it was always the same: pitch-black. And hot chocolate every morning, and roast veal every noon with applesauce, creamy rice, and smoked sausages, and after that raspberry delight, over and over and over and over again, each day exactly like the other.

A thousand years passed by and then, one day, there was a grating, clattering sound as someone moved the big iron bolt off the gate. Peter entered. "Well," he said, "how do you like it here?"

At this the rich man got dreadfully angry. "How do I like it here? I don't like it at all! It's just awful. It couldn't be worse! How can you possibly imagine anyone enjoying themselves in such a worthless palace? How can you possibly imagine anyone sticking it out for a thousand years in this place? You hear nothing! You see nothing! Nobody cares about you! It's all just a bunch of lies about your highly prized heaven and eternal blessedness. It's an absolutely miserable arrangement!"

Peter looked at him with great astonishment and said, "Oh! so you don't know where you are? Do you really think you are in heaven? Certainly not. You are in hell. You wished yourself into it. The palace is part of hell."

"In hell?" The rich man was horrified. "But this can't be hell! Where are the devil and the fire and the cauldron?"

Peter replied, "You think sinners are still roasted as in former times. That hasn't been done for quite a while now. But you are in hell all right; you can be sure of that, and pretty deep down too. One could pity you. Given time, you'll begin to realize this yourself." By now the rich man was terrified. He dropped into his easy chair, held his hands over his face and began to sob, "In hell! In hell! Oh, poor, unhappy man that I am, whatever shall become of me?"

And another hundred years passed by and yet another hundred years. One can't possibly imagine how dreadfully long time now seemed to the rich man. After the second thousand years had come to an end, Peter entered for a second visit.

"Ach Peter!" the rich man called out. "I have such a longing for you! I am so very sad. And is this situation meant to continue forever? For all Eternity?"

He stopped to think and then asked, "Saint Peter, how long is Eternity, would you say?"

Peter answered, "When another ten thousand years have passed away, then Eternity begins."

When the rich man heard this, his head sank to his chest and bitter tears began to flow. Unnoticed, Peter stood behind his chair and secretly counted his tears. When he saw that there were so many tears that our dear God would most certainly forgive him, he said, "Come. I will show you something very beautiful. I know of a knothole in the attic upstairs, through which you can catch a glimpse of heaven."

Peter led him up the attic steps, then through a jumble of all kinds of old things, into a little room. As they entered, a golden shaft of light flashed through the knothole and right onto Peter's forehead. It looked as if flames of fire flickered on his brow.

The rich man trembled. "That comes from the real heaven," he said.

"Yes," Peter answered, "now look through." But the knothole was high up in the wall and the rich man was short; he could hardly reach it.

"You must make yourself tall and stand on tip-toe," Peter said. The rich man made a great effort and stretched himself for all he was worth. Finally he managed to look through the knothole and it really was so. He could look into heaven. There was God the Father on his throne amongst the stars and the clouds, in all his splendor and glory, surrounded by all his angels and saints.

"Ach!" he called out, "How wonderful! How beautiful! When you live on earth you just can't imagine such glory! But tell me, who is sitting at God's feet with his back to me?"

"That is the poor man, who was your neighbor on earth, who came up here with you on the same day. Remember? I asked you both to

consider how you would like to live in Eternity, how you would like to spend your time. He only wished for a little footstool to sit at God's feet. And he received it, just like you received your palace."

Peter walked away quietly. The rich man didn't notice him leaving. He was standing spellbound, gazing and gazing into heaven. It was none too easy for him, since the knothole was so high up that he had to stand on tiptoe all the time. But he didn't mind because the sights he saw were so very beautiful.

Another thousand years passed by and Peter came for the last time. He found the rich man still standing on the same spot in the little attic room, stretching up to the knothole on tiptoe and gazing into heaven. He was so completely absorbed that he never even noticed Peter entering. Peter waited, but finally laid his hand on the rich man's shoulder and said, "Come with me. You have stood here long enough. Your sins are forgiven. I have come to take you to heaven. You could have had a much easier time of it if you had wanted to. Is it not so?"

THE RUSTED KNIGHT

Richard von Volkmann Leander

There once lived a very rich and noble knight who wallowed in his wealth and was proud and hard-hearted to the poor. To punish him, God caused him to rust on one side. His left arm became rusty, and his left leg, and the same with half of his body. Only his face remained free of rust. So the knight wore a glove, sewed to his sleeve, on his left hand, and did not take it off by day or night so that no one would see how very rusty he was.

Then he repented and tried to begin a new life. He said good-bye to his old friends and drinking mates and asked a beautiful and devout girl to marry him. She had heard many bad things about the knight, but because his face had remained clean she only half believed them—and when he was with her and spoke kindly to her, she did not believe them at all. So she agreed to marry him in spite of everything. After the wedding, during the first night, she noticed that he never took the glove off his left hand and got a terrible shock. She didn't say a word to anyone, but told her husband the next morning that she wanted to go into the woods to pray in the small chapel. At the side of the chapel there was a cave where an old hermit lived who had spent many years in Jerusalem. He was so devout and holy that people from far and near went on pilgrimages to see him. She went to him to ask his advice.

When she had told the old hermit everything, he went into the chapel and prayed for a long time. When he came out again he said, "You

can still save your husband, but it will be hard. If you begin and do not carry it through, you yourself will get rusty. Your husband has done many evil things during his lifetime, and he has been proud and hard towards the poor. If you will go begging for him—barefoot and in rags like the very poorest beggar woman—until you have saved one hundred gold pieces, then your husband will be redeemed. Then take him by his hand and go with him into the church and put the gold pieces into the collection bowl for the poor. If you do that, God will forgive your husband his sins, the rust will disappear, and he will be as clean and pure as before.”

“That I will do,” said the young wife, “however hard it is and however long it takes. I want to save my husband, for he is only rusted on the outside. I am sure of that!” So she left and walked deep into the woods. Before long she met a little old woman collecting firewood who wore a tattered old skirt covered by a cloak which was as full of patches as the Holy Roman Empire. It was impossible to recognize what color the patches had once been because rain and sun had done their share on the cloak.

“If you will give me your skirt and your cloak, old mother,” said the knight’s lady, “I will give you all the money I have in my pocket and my silk dress as well, because I want to be poor.”

The old woman looked at her in amazement and said, “Well, well, I will do it, I will do it, my fine little damsel, if you really mean what you say. I have seen many things in the world, and I have met many people who wanted to get rich, but that someone wanted badly to get poor, that I have never heard. It will not be pleasant for you, with your delicate little hands and your sweet little face.”

But the knight’s lady had already begun to take off her dress. She looked so serious and sad that the old woman realized that she was in earnest. So she handed over her skirt and cloak and helped her to put

them on, and then asked, "What are you going to do now, my pretty little daughter?"

"I will go begging," answered the knight's lady.

"Begging! Well, don't grieve about that, it is nothing to be ashamed of. At the gate of heaven many a one will have to learn to beg who did not learn it here on earth. But before you go I will teach you the beggar's song:

Begging we loaf about
hungry and thirsty.
All day and every day—
Beggars are we.

Give me a crust of bread—
I've not got any.
I'll take a dollar bill
or even a penny.

We dress in tattered rags,
and carry empty bags,
If we have luck today
We'll feast the night away.

"A nice song, isn't it?" said the old woman. Then she put on the silken garments, jumped into the bushes, and disappeared.

The knight's lady wandered through the woods, and after a while she met a peasant who had gone out to look for a maid, for it was harvest time and everyone was needed. The knight's lady stood still, held out her hand, and said, "Give me a crust of bread, or even a penny!" But she didn't sing the other verses because she didn't like them. The peasant looked at the woman, and, seeing that in spite of her rags she was intelligent and healthy, he asked her whether she would like to become a serving maid in his house. "I will give you a cake at Easter, a goose on

St. Martin's day, and at Christmas a silver dollar and a new dress. Are you satisfied with that?"

"No," replied the lady. "I have to go begging; the good Lord wants it so."

The peasant grew angry at this. He scolded and cursed her, and said mockingly, "The good Lord wants it so, eh? Did he take you out for lunch, eh, what? Lentils perhaps, with fried sausages? Or are you maybe his aunt, that you know so well what he wants? A lazy bones, that's what you are!" He went his way and left her standing with nothing. Then the lady began to realize that begging would not be easy.

Yet she went on, and after some time she came to a place where the road parted, marked by a stone on either side. A beggar with a crutch sat on one of them. Since she was tired, she sat down to rest on the other stone for a little while. Scarcely had she sat down when the beggar struck at her with his crutch and shouted: "Away with you, you good-for-nothing! Are you trying to steal my customers away from me with your rags and your pretty face? This is my corner. Be gone quickly, or you shall see what a fine fiddle-stick my wooden crutch will make on your back!"

The lady sighed, got up, and went away as far as her feet would carry her. At last she came to a large city. Here she stayed. She sat down at a roadside leading to a little church and begged. During the night she slept on the steps of the church. She lived like that, day in and day out. One person would give her a penny and another a nickel. But there were many who didn't give her anything, or even scolded her as the peasant had done, and she realized that it would take a long time to collect a hundred gold pieces.

When she had been begging for nearly a year, she had saved only one gold piece. On that day, when the first gold piece was saved, she gave birth to a most beautiful little son whom she named "Yet-Redeemed,"

because she hoped that one day she would redeem her husband. She tore a piece off from her cloak to wrap the child in, a good yard wide, so that now the cloak reached only to her knees. With her baby in her arms she continued her begging. When he cried, she rocked him to sleep singing:

Sleep in my arms securely,
poor little beggar's child.
Your father lives in a castle;
out here the wind blows wild.

He's dressed in silk and velvet,
drinks wine and eats white bread.
If he would see our suffering,
he'd wish that he were dead.

He does not need to worry,
I keep you safe and warm.
His need by far is greater—
May God have mercy on him!

Then people stopped and looked at the poor young beggar woman with such a beautiful child, and gave her more than before. She was reassured and did not cry any more, for she knew that one day she would redeem her husband, if she could only endure.

WHEN HIS LADY did not return, the knight in his castle became deeply saddened and said to himself, "She has noticed everything and has therefore left me." He went into the woods to find the hermit and to hear whether she had been in the chapel to pray. But the hermit was brusque and strict with him and said, "Didn't you live wildly, drinking and feasting? Weren't you proud and hard towards the poor? One must not put a good apple and a bad one in the same basket, else the good one will get rotten too!"

Then the knight sat down on the ground, took his helmet off, and wept bitterly. When the hermit saw that, he became friendly and said, "Since I see that your heart is not rusty like the rest of your body, I will give you some advice: Do good, go into all the churches you pass, and you will find your wife again."

So the knight left his castle and rode into the wide world. Wherever he found poor people in need, he helped them, and when he saw a church, he went in and prayed. But he did not find his wife.

Nearly a year had passed when he came into the city where his wife was begging on the church steps. Immediately he went towards the church. His wife recognized him from a distance, for he was tall and stately and wore a golden helmet with an eagle's claw on the rim, which sparkled in the sun. Then she became frightened, for she had only begged two gold pieces in all this time, and she knew that it was not enough to redeem him. She pulled her cloak over her face so that he would not recognize her, and pulled in her feet so that he might not see them, for her cloak only came to her knees ever since she had ripped off the strip for her baby. When the knight passed her, he heard her sobbing quietly. When he saw her tattered and patched cloak and the beautiful child on her lap who was also wrapped only in rags, it grieved him deeply. He stepped closer and asked her why she was crying. But the woman did not answer and sobbed even harder, no matter how much she tried to stifle it. Then the knight pulled out his purse, in which were many more than a hundred gold pieces. He laid it on her lap, and said, "I will give you all I have, even if I have to go begging myself."

Then, the cloak slipped accidentally from her head, and the knight saw that it was his own dear wife to whom he had given the money. He took her in his arms and kissed her in spite of the rags she wore, and when he learned that the little child was his own son, he kissed him too. Then the knight's lady took her husband's hand and led him into

the church. She placed the money on the altar and said, "I wanted to redeem you, but you have done it yourself."

AND SO IT WAS, for when the knight stepped out of the church, the curse was lifted and the rust, which had covered his whole left side, had disappeared. He lifted his wife and child onto his horse and walked beside them. Together they returned to his castle, where they lived happily together for many years. The knight did so much good for his people that everyone loved him and praised his goodness.

But the begging rags, which his wife had worn, he hung in a precious shrine and first thing every morning he looked at them and said, "This is my morning worship. The good Lord does not take it amiss, for he knows how I mean it."

THE KNIGHTS OF THE SILVER SHIELD

Raymond MacDonald Alden

There was once a splendid castle in a forest, with great stone walls and a high gateway, and turrets that rose away above the tallest trees. The forest was dark and dangerous, and many cruel giants lived in it; but in the castle was a company of knights who were kept there by the king of the country to help travelers who might be in the forest and to fight with the giants whenever they could.

Each of these knights wore a beautiful suit of armor and carried a long spear, while over his helmet there floated a great red plume that could be seen a long way off by anyone in distress. But the most wonderful thing about the knights' armor was their shields. They were not like those of other knights, but had been made by a great magician who had lived in the castle many years before. They were made of silver, and sometimes shone in the sunlight with dazzling brightness. But at other times the surface of the shields would be clouded as though by a mist, and one could not see his face reflected there as he could when they shone brightly.

Now, when each young knight received his spurs and his armor, a new shield was also given him from among those that the magician had made. When the shield was new, its surface was always cloudy and dull. But as the knight began to do service against the giants, or went on expeditions to help poor travelers in the forest, his shield grew brighter

and brighter, so that he could see his face clearly reflected in it. But if he proved to be a lazy or cowardly knight, and let the giants get the better of him, or did not care what became of the travelers, then the shield grew more and more cloudy, until the knight became ashamed to carry it.

But this was not all. When any one of the knights fought a particularly hard battle and won the victory, or when he went on some hard errand for the lord of the castle and was successful, not only did his silver shield grow brighter, but when one looked into the center of it he could see something like a golden star shining in its very heart. This was the greatest honor that a knight could achieve, and the other knights always spoke of such a one as having “won his star.” It was usually not till he was pretty old and tried as a soldier that he could win it. At the time when this story begins, the lord of the castle himself was the only one of the knights whose shield bore the golden star.

There came a time when the worst giants in the forest gathered themselves together to have a battle against the knights. They made a camp in a dark hollow not far from the castle and gathered all their best warriors together, and all the knights made ready to fight them. The windows of the castle were closed and barred, the air was full of the noise of armor being made ready for use, and the knights were so excited that they could scarcely rest or eat.

Now there was a young knight in the castle named Sir Roland who was among those most eager for the battle. He was a splendid warrior, with eyes that shone like stars whenever there was anything to do in the way of knightly deeds. And although he was still quite young, his shield had begun to shine enough to show plainly that he had done bravely in some of his errands through the forest. This battle, he thought, would be the great opportunity of his life. And on the morning of the day when they were to go forth to it and all the knights assembled in the

great hall of the castle to receive the commands of their leaders, Sir Roland hoped that he would be put in the most dangerous place of all, so that he could show what knightly stuff he was made of.

But when the lord of the castle came to him, as he went about in full armor giving his commands, he said: "One brave knight must stay behind and guard the gateway of the castle, and it is you, Sir Roland, being one of the youngest, whom I have chosen for this."

At these words Sir Roland was so disappointed that he bit his lip and closed his helmet over his face so that the other knights might not see it. For a moment he felt as if he must reply angrily to the commander, and that it was not right to leave so sturdy a knight behind when he was eager to fight. But he struggled against this feeling, and went quietly to look after his duties at the gate. The gateway was high and narrow, and was reached from outside by a high, narrow bridge that crossed the moat which surrounded the castle on every side. When an enemy approached, the knight on guard rang a bell just inside the gate, and the bridge was drawn up against the castle wall so that no one could come across the moat. So the giants had long ago given up trying to attack the castle itself.

Today the battle was to be in the dark hollow in the forest, and it was not likely that there would be anything to do at the castle gate except to watch it like a common doorkeeper. It was not strange that Sir Roland thought someone else might have done this.

Presently all the other knights marched out in their flashing armor, their red plumes waving over their heads and their spears in their hands. The lord of the castle stopped only to tell Sir Roland to keep guard over the gate until they had all returned, and to let no one enter. Then they went into the shadows of the forest and were soon lost to sight.

Sir Roland stood looking after them long after they had gone, thinking how happy he would be if he were on the way to battle like them.

But after a little he put this out of his mind and tried to think of pleasanter things. It was a long time before anything happened, or any word came from battle.

At last Sir Roland saw one of knights come limping down the path to the castle, and he went out on the bridge to meet him. Now, this knight was not a brave one, and he had been frightened away as soon as he was wounded.

"I have been hurt," he said, "so that I cannot fight any more. But I could watch the gate for you if you would like to go back in my place."

At first Sir Roland's heart leaped with joy at this, but then he remembered what the commander had told him on going away, and he said: "I should like to go, but a knight belongs where his commander has put him. My place is here at the gate, and I cannot open it even for you. Your place is at the battle."

The knight was ashamed when he heard this, and he presently turned about and went into the forest again.

So Sir Roland kept guard silently for another hour. Then there came an old beggar woman down the path to the castle. She asked Sir Roland if she might come in and have some food. He told her that no one could enter the castle that day, but that he would send a servant out to her with food, and that she might sit and rest as long as she would.

"I have been past the hollow in the forest where the battle is going on," said the old woman while she was waiting for her food.

"And how do you think it is going?" asked Sir Roland.

"Badly for the knights, I am afraid," said the old woman. "The giants are fighting as they have never fought before. I should think you had better go and help your friends."

"I should like to, indeed," said Sir Roland. "But I am set to guard the gateway of the castle, and cannot leave."

“One fresh knight would make a great difference when they are all weary with fighting,” said the old woman. “I should think that, while there are no enemies about, you would be much more useful there.”

“You may well think so,” said Sir Roland, “and so may I; but it is neither you nor I that is commander here.”

“I suppose,” said the old woman then, “that you are one of the kind of knights who like to keep out of fighting. You are lucky to have so good an excuse for staying at home.”

And she laughed a thin and taunting laugh.

Then Sir Roland was very angry, and thought that if it were only a man instead of a woman, he would show him whether he liked fighting or not. But as it was a woman, he shut his lips and set his teeth hard together, and as the servant came just then with the food he had sent for, he gave it to the old woman quickly, and shut the gate that she might not talk to him any more.

It was not very long before he heard someone calling outside. Sir Roland opened the gate and saw standing at the other end of the drawbridge a little old man in a long black cloak. “Why are you knocking here?” he said. “The castle is closed today.”

“Are you Sir Roland?” said the little old man.

“Yes,” said Sir Roland.

“Then you ought not to be staying here when your commander and his knights are having so hard a struggle with the giants, and when you have the chance to make of yourself the greatest knight in this kingdom. Listen to me! I have brought you a magic sword!”

As he said this, the old man drew from under his coat a wonderful sword that flashed in the sunlight as if it were covered with diamonds. “This is the sword of all swords,” he said, “and it is for you, if you will leave your idling here by the castle gate and carry it to the battle. Nothing can stand before it. When you lift it the giants will fall back, your

master will be saved, and you will be crowned the victorious knight—the one who will soon take his commander’s place as lord of the castle.”

Now Sir Roland believed that it was a magician who was speaking to him, for it certainly appeared to be a magic sword. It seemed so wonderful that the sword should be brought to him that he reached out his hand as though he would take it, and the little old man came forward as though he would cross the drawbridge into the castle. But as he did so, it came to Sir Roland’s mind again that that bridge and the gateway had been entrusted to him, and he called out “No!” to the old man, so that he stopped where he was standing. But he waved the shining sword in the air again and said: “It is for you! Take it and win the victory!”

Sir Roland was really afraid that if he looked any longer at the sword, or listened to any more words of the old man, he would not be able to hold himself within the castle. For this reason he struck the great bell at the gateway, which was the signal for the servants inside to pull in the chains of the drawbridge, and instantly they began to pull, and the drawbridge came up, so that the old man could not cross it to enter the castle, nor Sir Roland to go out.

Then, as he looked across the moat, Sir Roland saw a wonderful thing. The little old man threw off his black cloak, and as he did so he began to grow bigger and bigger, until in a minute more he was a giant as tall as any in the forest. At first Sir Roland could scarcely believe his eyes. Then he realized that this must be one of their giant enemies, who had changed himself to a little old man through some magic power, that he might make his way into the castle while all the knights were away. Sir Roland shuddered to think what might have happened if he had taken the sword and left the gate unguarded. The giant shook his fist across the moat that lay between them, and then, knowing that he could do nothing more, he went angrily back into the forest.

Sir Roland now resolved not to open the gate again, and to pay no attention to any other visitor. But it was not long before he heard

a sound that made him spring forward in joy. It was the bugle of the lord of the castle, and there sounding after it the bugles of many of the knights that were with him, pealing so joyfully that Sir Roland was sure they were safe and happy. As they came nearer, he could hear their shouts of victory. So he gave the signal to let down the drawbridge again, and went out to meet them. They were dusty and bloodstained and weary, but they had won the battle with the giants, and it had been such a great victory that there had never been a happier home-coming. Sir Roland greeted them all as they passed in over the bridge, and then, when he had closed the gate and fastened it, he followed them into the great hall of the castle. The lord of the castle took his place on the highest seat with the other knights about him, and Sir Roland came forward with the key of the gate to give his account of what he had done in the place to which the commander had appointed him. The lord of the castle bowed to him as a sign for him to begin, but just as he opened his mouth to speak, one of the knights cried out:

“The shield! The shield! Sir Roland’s shield!”

Everyone turned and looked at the shield which Sir Roland carried on his left arm. He himself could see only the top of it, and did not know what they could mean. But what they saw was the golden star of knighthood, shining brightly from the center of Sir Roland’s shield. There had never been such amazement in the castle before.

Sir Roland knelt before the lord of the castle to receive his commands. He still did not know why everyone was looking at him so excitedly, and wondered if he had in some way done wrong.

“Speak, Sir Knight,” said the commander, as soon as he could find his voice after his surprise, “and tell us all that has happened today at the castle. Have you been attacked? Have any giants come hither? Did you fight them alone?”

“No, my Lord,” said Sir Roland. “Only one giant has been here, and he went away silently when he found he could not enter.”

Then he told all that had happened through the day.

When he had finished, the knights looked at one another, but no one spoke a word. Then they looked again at Sir Roland's shield to make sure that their eyes had not deceived them, and there the golden star was still shining.

After a little silence the lord of the castle spoke.

"Men make mistakes," he said, "but our silver shields are never mistaken. Sir Roland has fought and won the hardest battle of all today."

Then the others all rose and saluted Sir Roland, who was the youngest knight that ever carried the golden star.

PARSIFAL

Hardy Arnold

PROLOGUE

Every man is Parsifal.
Each seeks through sin, need, and torment
For redemption and true life,
To find the way through horror's night
And strive toward the light.
But though his goal is high, his striving pure,
He must first endure deepest need.
Only when he sees his sin
Can he find redeeming grace.
If in his hour of abandonment and need
He bows in humility before his God,
He plunges into the stream of Love
And what he is and has are his no more.
Then will he live in joyful, radiant clarity,
His only goal
The Truth of God.

Parsifal at last attained the wondrous goal
That he had sought through sin and suffering.

Messengers go forth from place to place,
Proclaiming words of liberating grace.
Through pain and suffering the seeker shares
The Light of Salvation.

This play thus calls us all to holy fight,
To courage, and the valor of the knight,
So that this earth may once become
A refuge of light and love.

SCENE I

Violin plays. Parsifal's mother, Herzeloide (literally "Sorrow-heart"), wanders alone in the forest.

Herzeloide

The forest is lonely and still,
The wind rustles the leaves,
The spring murmurs its song,
And far, far away are the joys and sorrows of the world.
Never shall the evil stream of time
Beat with its wild waves on the shore of Soltane.
Never shall Parsifal learn of sorrow, knighthood, or battle.
He shall grow up like Nature herself,
Like the high forest, the tender flowers,
And the many-voiced birds.
He shall be taught by the roaring of the brook,
The playing of the clouds, the call of the stag.

Enter Parsifal.

Parsifal

O my mother, noble Herzeloide,

What shall I do? My limbs are burning, my pulse is racing,
I am struggling for very breath!

Herzeloyde

What is wrong with you?

Parsifal

I lay by the spring in the forest, dreaming.
The birds sang so sweetly; I heard the wind sigh
In the tops of the branches, so soft was its cry,
And the mighty clouds sailed on and on through the blue.
Mother, oh tell me, dear Mother, where to?
Where does the wood end, and what is beyond?

Herzeloyde

That is something I shall never tell you.
Our servant shall slay all the birds in the wood,
So that their voices and their song
Shall trouble your peace no more.

Parsifal

Kill the birds? Oh Mother, no!
Once I picked up my bow and arrow,
And in play took aim to see if I could hit the mark.
Immediately the bird fell to the ground. Oh Mother,
How I wept and cried. How I sought to breathe
Life into it, that it should live. But it did not move.
I stanchd the wound with moss,
But it lay at my feet, cold and stiff.
I covered my face with my blood-stained hands,
And wept for sorrow. Never,
Mother, never will I kill again.
Neither shall you.

The birds are not to blame;
It is from my own heart this longing springs.
If you would suppress it
You must tear from my breast
My heart, which is afire.

Herzeloyde

What terrible words you utter!
My Parsifal, I will not have the birds slain.
How could I grieve God and his creation?

Parsifal

God? God? I have never heard that word.
Mother, tell me who he is,
And where I may seek and find him!

Herzeloyde

My son, God is brighter than the brightest day;
He is faithfulness and love. He made all things.
When need presses in on you, and sorrow
And pain torment you with violent grief,
Flee to him, for he is more compassionate
Than the love of your own mother!

Parsifal

More loving and more compassionate
Than you, my own dear mother?

Herzeloyde

Yes, he is the source of all love,
The fount of light. But flee from
The dark one, the master of hell.
He is your foe; he seeks to harm you.

He is unfaithful and the author of doubt.

Herzeloide exits. Alone, Parsifal hums a song, but breaks off in the middle.

Parsifal

What do I hear? A clattering, the sound of horses' hoofs!

Ah! Is it the dark one?

Then I will hurl my spear at him.

Three knights, Lancelot, Bedivere, and Lionel enter.

You figures of Light! God is here!

He falls to the ground.

Bedivere

Get up, young fool, you're blocking our way!

Parsifal

You are Light! My mother said

God alone is the source of light.

Lancelot

No, my boy, we are not gods,

But the service of God is our goal.

Parsifal

Who are you?

Lionel

We are knights.

Parsifal

Knights? Who made you and where

Is your home? What is your name?

Lancelot

My name is Lancelot, and my companions' names

Are Bedivere and Lionel. We rode out
From King Arthur's Castle in Glamis
Where the boldest knights in all the land
Are gathered at his Round Table.

Parsifal

O stay with me, make me a knight!

The knights turn to ride off.

Bedivere

If you are of noble blood and called
To knighthood's way, then seek the King.

Exit knights.

Parsifal

They have gone, gone—O Mother, Mother!

Herzeloyde

My son, what do you want?

Parsifal

Let me go after the knights
To King Arthur's Round Table!

Herzeloyde

After the knights? Who spoke that evil word to you?
Who told you of King Arthur?

Parsifal

Lancelot.

Herzeloyde

Lancelot?

Parsifal

O Mother, let me go.

Long have I been consumed with yearning!
I will go and fetch my horse.

Exit Parsifal.

Herzeloyde

O this wicked world!
Well, let him go dressed in fool's attire,
So none shall know him, and all will mock at him.

Enter Parsifal, leading his horse.

Parsifal

I set out to seek God and true chivalry.

Herzeloyde

Go then. Now I must bear my sorrow alone.
Take this mantle and this cap.

She dresses him in fool's clothes.

May the God of Light be your helper and protection.
Do not forget your Mother and her suffering.

Parsifal

Farewell!

He rides off.

SCENE II

Violin plays. Sigune sits and weeps by the side of the road as Parsifal enters.

Parsifal

Be greeted, as my mother instructed me!
Why do you sit here weeping, noble maiden?

Sigune

They slew my husband and lord.

Parsifal

Who is the murderer? Tell me that,
And I will kill him with my spear!

Sigune

What is your name? Where is your father's house?

Parsifal

I have never known my father. My mother
Calls me her dear child and loving son,
And sometimes, too, she calls me Parsifal.

Sigune

So you are the son of my mother's brother.
O Parsifal, do not be the slave of vengeance;
The son of a king shows love and goodness to all.

Parsifal

Am I a king's son? Tell me then,
Who was my father? Is he still alive?

Sigune

King Gahmuret was his name. The enemy
In eastern lands struck him down
As he set out to do bold deeds.
Herzeloide fled with her child
To a lonely wood.

Parsifal

The world is wicked.
I hasten to avenge my father.

Sigune

Ride boldly to meet the Sun,

Then you will surely find
What you are seeking in your deepest heart.

SCENE III

In King Arthur's court, the knights are gathered around the Round Table. Parsifal enters the hall.

Parsifal

I greet you, as my mother told me to!
Are you King Arthur?

King Arthur

I am he.
And Queen Guinevere is seated by my side.

Parsifal

I beg of you, make me a knight.

King Arthur

What is your name?

Parsifal

Parsifal.

King Arthur

Seneschal Kay, pronounce the oath.

Kay

This is the oath of the Bold Knights of the Round Table.
Faithfulness we swear to our invisible King,
Loyalty to the Brothers of our Fellowship.
Faithful we will be to noble Chivalry.
Purity is our highest goal.
No lie shall pass our lips.

We fight against shameful injustice,
And protect the poor and the suffering.
We will give everything, even to death.
We will manfully strive, true to the last breath,
That we may never dishonor our word.
We swear this oath upon Arthur's sword!

King Arthur

Are you prepared to take this oath?

Parsifal

Yes! Make me a knight this very day!

Lancelot

You must know one thing—
No one sits on high.
The table is round; we are brothers all united
In fellowship. Even the king is one of us.
We honor God alone.

Parsifal

For this my heart is ready.

King Arthur

Tomorrow then, I will knight you.

Parsifal

I beg of you, knight me still today!

King Arthur

You do not have the necessary armor.

Parsifal

I saw the Red Knight at the gate.
If you permit it, I will fetch his armor.

Lionel

The Red Knight? He is strong. Not one of us
Here in the hall dares challenge him.
He robbed the Queen's own royal cup in his impudence
And escaped scot free.

Parsifal

Let me strike him down.

Bedivere

Do you dare?

Parsifal

I hurry forth to win his armor.

He exits.

Bors

No sooner is he come, than he is off again!

SCENE IV

Parsifal approaches Gornemont, a wise man.

Parsifal

I greet you as my mother taught me!
I am seeking God; help me to find him.
My mother told me I should always seek
Counsel and help from older heads.
Teach me.

Gornemont

You wear mail of red. Then you defeated the Red Knight?

Parsifal

I did.

Gornemont

And beneath this armor still you wear
The fool's motley? Well, become a true knight now
And prove yourself worthy of your armor!

Parsifal

Gornemont, teach me to do good!
This, too, my mother counseled me to ask.

Gornemont

You are noble, yet your heart and mind
Are still that of a child. Learn to be silent.
Do not prattle always about your mother,
But quietly bear her image in your heart!
Do not ask so much, but rather listen.
Learn by marveling. Humbly answer
Those who ask of you.
Stand by the needy, uphold
The weak. Help all who weep
And sorrow. Show yourself worthy
Of noblest chivalry. Bear you sword
With devotion and with dignity.

Parsifal

I thank you for your noble counsel,
And I will always strive for worthy deeds.

SCENE V

A Knight and Maiden approach.

Noble Maiden

And so he came to save Kondwiramur
The delicate white flower, our Queen.

Knight

He drove the enemy host in wild flight,
And broke the vicious circle of hunger and need.

Noble Maiden

King Parsifal and Queen Kondwiramur,
Bestowed upon this land of Pelrapeire!
A noble pair, they bring salvation.

A wedding procession approaches, with two little girls scattering flowers. The procession sings a love song accompanied by violin and flute. They march three times in a circle, then exit. Parsifal and Kondwiramur enter.

Parsifal

Most beautiful, most noble of women,
You are Queen in the land of my heart!

Kondwiramur

I tremble and thrill with overflowing joy
To be united with you, O Parsifal.

They give each other the hand.

Parsifal

But now I must go on.

Kondwiramur

Go from me?
Almost before the wedding bells have ceased to ring?

Parsifal

I am seeking, and have not yet found.

Kondwiramur

Not found what you sought with me?

Parsifal

It is the highest that I seek; 'tis God.

Kondwiramur

O Parsifal, do not leave me.

Parsifal

I must.

Squire, saddle my horse! This very day I ride!

Kondwiramur

And will you return?

Parsifal

When I have found the Light

For you and all,

Then I will call you.

Kondwiramur

Then fare you well, my dearest husband.

Fare you well!

Parsifal

I must ride many miles today,

My heart is afire with longing.

Farewell!

Choir sings.

SCENE VI

Violin plays. Sigune sits grieving.

Sigune

My slain knight! My heart still cries out

In grief and wild sorrowing,

And longs for redemption
From darkness and all guilt. Where is the Light?
I wait still for the answer, though not a single
Ray of light breaks into the darkness.
But quiet! A knight approaches.

Parsifal

Noble lady,
Do you still lament and weep?

The violin begins to play again.

Sigune

And art thou still seeking God?

Parsifal

I beheld a great marvel!
A glorious light in a beautiful cup,
And there I felt the presence of God.

Sigune

You saw the Holy Grail?
Then salvation is come to you and me
And to all men imprisoned in the fear and need of death.
But tell me how this came about.

Parsifal

The gentle waves of a blue lake
Lapped at the woodland shore.
I had lost my way. An old fisherman,
Suffering written on his face,
Was drawing in his nets weighed
Heavily with fish. I greeted him
And asked him where I might shelter.
He directed me to a nearby castle on a craggy cliff.

Sigune

You found the place and were taken in?

Parsifal

There was a high hall with many knights;
The king lay careworn upon a couch.
A door opened on the left; a squire appeared
Bearing a spear, and from the shaft, blood
Ran down red in heavy drops.
The king cried out; he groaned in desperate woe,
And called and cried for healing and redemption!
And then another door was opened on the right—
Maidens with garlands, their faces radiant,
Passed through with burning lamps,
Followed by one, the fairest of virgins,
Bearing in her hands the precious cup.
Light and warmth streamed forth; a sweet fragrance
Filled the room. The faces of all shone
In silent sorrow and pure joy.
The Grail refreshed as with marvelous food and drink.
Each received nourishment; the king was newly strengthened,
But then the cup vanished and heavy sorrow
Descended on the hall.

Sigune

You asked Amfortas why he suffered so
And offered him your help?

Parsifal

That I did not do. I was silent and listened.

Sigune

You did not ask? Woe to you! O Parsifal,

You declined the grace that called you.

Tell me, is it so?

Parsifal

I said nothing,

Wise Gornemont told me to keep my peace.

Sigune

And you saw all his suffering and torment

And really did not ask? And did not

Offer your hand in love to help him?

Did you not see his wounds?

And you stood there silent, and cold at heart?

Woe to you, a curse lies on us all.

Parsifal

What shall I do?

Sigune

The hour is past,

Lost, forfeit. I go to plead my need

Before the Almighty God.

She exits. Violin plays.

SCENE VII

Parsifal

Lost and forfeit? I sought

And found the light and did not love!

Kondwiramur, I left you too.

How I long for your love,

Your beauty and your comfort!

He stares vacantly ahead. Lancelot, Kay and Bors enter.

Lancelot

We greet you, O King Parsifal.

Kay

We have heard much of your famous deeds.

Bors

The Knights of the Round Table

Invite you. King Arthur himself

Wishes to knight you.

Curtain opens on King Arthur's court. Parsifal, Lancelot, Kay, and Bors enter the court.

King Arthur

Welcome, Parsifal,

To the Round Table. Be now our companion,

A brother, and a worthy knight. I offer you

This place here on my left hand.

Kay

Hail, King Parsifal! You defeated

The enemies of Kondwiramur

And won her, most noble woman, to be your wife!

Receive this wreath of honor!

Bors

The land resounded with the echo of your deeds,

How you boldly overcame the Red Knight

And have never given way to an opponent.

Parsifal

I would gladly stay with you, noble knights,

But I long deeply for my Kondwiramur.

Lancelot

I am ready to ride this very day
To Pelrapeire to invite her
To the celebration of your knighting
And acceptance into the Fellowship of the Round Table.

Knocking is heard.

King Arthur

Squires, open to our guest.

Kundry enters.

Kundry

Woe to you, O knights.
Your Round Table is dishonored,
Your glory and fame brought to shame
Through Parsifal, the Knight in Red.
He has acted evilly and brought disgrace upon himself and you.

Kay

That cannot be. Tell us what he has done.

Kundry

Parsifal, you are accursed.
You have no compassion;
Love and mercy are far from you.
Cursed be your radiant form,
For no true heart beats within.
May you never know friends,
May comfort be far removed from you.
Only torment and doubt shall be your reward.
Even the light of the sun itself shall be
Cold and dead for you, cursed, O Parsifal.

King Arthur

Who are you, who reviles us so?

Kundry

I am Kundry, a messenger of the Grail.

King Arthur

I have never heard of the Grail before.

My Knights, can you tell me its meaning?

Kay

We know nothing of this.

Kundry

Well then, all you knights,

I am here to tell you

Of the work and meaning of the Grail.

It is the Cup of the Blood and of the Glory;

It bestows the Holy Meal and gathers around it

A holy Brotherhood in solemn bond.

It is heavy; its burden not to be borne.

Yet the pure virgins bear it as though it were a feather.

The Castle of the Grail is everywhere, yet at no one place,

And no one finds it by setting out to seek it.

But the knights of its salvation are brothers

And dedicate their all. No longer do they

Own property or seek their own advancement,

For the Grail is all their blessedness and joy. It bestows Life.

Whoever beholds it is spared from death for seven days.

It nourishes those who serve it. Only those who are pure

And bold are chosen to serve the Grail.

Amfortas is now king, but he fell

Into grievous sin and bears a deep wound

In his body. This will never heal
Until a noble knight comes to the Castle of the Grail,
Who brings help with love and compassion the very first night.
But you, Parsifal, your heart is of stone!
You could have saved the king, but you did nothing.
Therefore you are accursed, woe to you!

Exit Kundry

Parsifal

Woe to me! The most holy treasure
This earth still sustains, I cast away!
Oh, horror! Now this heavy curse lies upon me.
I never wanted evil, I believed my mother's word
That God is Light and Faithfulness,
A helper in every need.
Now this faithfulness brings me shame and disgrace,
And no one can help me in my pain.
Alas, who is God? Alas, what is God?
I am no longer worthy of my knight's oath.
I plunge into night and death.

Exit Parsifal. Violin plays. The knights behold a vision of the Grail.

Lionel

Look, it is descending to us!

Bors

It is the Grail!

Bedivere

The Holy Cup.

Lancelot

Do you hear the lovely sounds?

Kay

The scent of blossoms?

Lionel

And deep bliss enfolds me!

Guinivere

A stream of life from the Holy Grail.

The grail disappears again. Lancelot rises.

Lancelot

Up, you knights all! Let this be our

Watchword and holy goal

to seek the Grail.

It has called us and awaits fulfillment.

I will not give up until I have found it,

And Amfortas is set free!

Lionel

We will seek with you, Lancelot!

All Knights

We seek the salvation and bliss of the Grail.

All exit, except Arthur, Guinevere and Squires. Choir sings.

SCENE VIII

Parsifal walks in a forest. A hermit stands nearby, and hears his lament.

Parsifal

Many years have passed since I incurred my guilt.

I have ridden through night and wind and scorching sun,
Through ice and snow, ever seeking you.
You Holy Grail! O God, you are hard!
My heart is heavy, full of torment
Is my mind. I have sought you
And have not found you.

Violin plays.

Hermit

You found him not?
The light is everywhere. Only your own darkness
Stands in your way, for you are lacking love.
You slew the Red Knight, offered Amfortas no help.
Your mother died
Of a broken heart, on account of your guilt.

Parsifal

Alas! Shame and disgrace
Never cease to dog my footsteps. I am lost!
Does God not help?
Is he not faithful?
I have never yet wanted evil
And yet I am a cold murderer!

Hermit

The guilt is yours. You hate God
And do not bear your sorrow with humility.
Only pain and need can make a noble heart ready.
Whosoever overcomes his doubt in a hard fight
And believes that in spite of all, there lives a God
Who loves me and prepares me

Through need and remorse, torment, and pain—
And whosoever believes, in face of heaviest need,
And loves and serves the one high goal—
The Kingdom! Only such a one is truly free,
And, himself redeemed, an instrument of redemption.
For it is only through blood and sacrifice
That Life is victorious over sin, guilt, and death!

Parsifal

Is this true, what your lips proclaim?
Am I then not lost, not yet damned?

Hermit

Let go your anger and quarreling with God—
Know that God is love alone.
He will make you pure and good and true,
If you are ready to fight and to believe
And give yourself in service to his Kingdom.

Parsifal sinks to his knees.

Parsifal

I believe! Yes, I believe and I am ready
To undertake this promise and to serve the Light.

Exit Hermit. Parsifal remains behind on his knees.

SCENE IX

Lancelot, Bors and Lionel meet Parsifal at the side of a road.

Lancelot

King Arthur greets you
And calls you once more to the Round Table.

Bors

You journeyed forth as a knight, helping
Many and bringing comfort and new strength.

Parsifal

I only did what my heart commanded,
Yet always and alone I sought the Grail.

Lancelot

And seek it still?

Parsifal

The sacred Grail remains my highest goal.

Lancelot

We call you to the Table Round,
To knightly sport and fray.

Parsifal

Let me consider for a while,
But who comes there?

Bors

'Tis Kundry.

Lionel

That fearful one? Oh horror!
I will depart. God protect you, Parsifal.

Knights exit. Enter Kundry.

Kundry

Hail to you, O Parsifal!
You are appointed King of the Grail.
Now you are pure from sin and guilt
In the light of Grace and the favor of God.

Parsifal

Where is the Grail?

Kundry

You stand before it!

*Parsifal turns around in amazement. The curtain opens into Amfortas' court.
Kondwiramur is also there, a child in her arms.*

Amfortas

We greet you at this holy hour.

Parsifal

I thank you!

in wonder

You are also here, Kondwiramur?

Kondwiramur

And with me, Lohengrin, your son.

Parsifal

O how immeasurably great is this hour!

Chorus of Knights

Sin brought need;

The wounds bleed.

Death shows its power.

“Decide!” cries the hour.

Amfortas

The Grail's pure light

I have tarnished.

Its bright ray

From the world has retreated.

The squire bearing the bleeding spear enters and goes slowly through the hall. Violin plays. Amfortas is in deep pain.

Amfortas

Woe to me, O woe!

Chorus of Knights

Woe to us, O woe!

Parsifal leaps forward, shocked.

Parsifal

Oh, what pain and torment!

How pale is his countenance!

I call upon you, O Mighty God!

Save us from guilt and need!

Parsifal reaches toward Amfortas. The door opens, and the maidens with the Grail enter. Violin plays.

Chorus of Maidens

Salvation and Light

Stream from the Grail.

Chorus of Knights

Out of the night,

A redeeming ray.

Amfortas straightens and stands slowly. He is healed.

Amfortas

We greet you, Parsifal,

King of the Grail.

Chorus of Knights

Love and faithfulness

Build anew.
What sin destroys,
Faith makes new.

Choir sings.

Parsifal

I lift up to you my heart
As a true cup of the Grail
Which lost all its blood in thirst
For your pure feast, O Christ.
Fill it anew unto the brim
With the fiery glow of your Blood
That henceforth I may bear it
Through my earthly nights and days, O Christ.

Chorus of Knights

Only glowing light
From God can quell
The flooding tides
Of darkest hell.

Chorus of Maidens

The sorrowing earth
Waits for salvation
To bring to humankind
The Grail's redemption.

Choir sings.

Parsifal

In their darkness and sin
All await love's redemption.
So now take the torches

In holy hands— out to all people
That they may find blessing.
Proclaim the gathering around the holy flame,
The victory of love,
The rule of the Grail,
And call them in
To celebrate the feast!

Choir sings.

*All exit— Maidens of the Grail in twos, then Parsifal and Kondwiramur, Amfortas
and the knights with torches.*

RACHOFF: A TRUE STORY

Karl Joseph Friedrich

Reader, behold your hand. Sometimes I watch my own as I write; or as I hold it up, fingers spread, so that it gleams like a pale star against the dark background of books piled on my table. The human hand—this bundle of bones, flesh, and nerves—think of all it can do. It can bless or curse. It can draw blood or bind a wound. It is gentle, agitated, vicious; supplicating, ardent, tender. It can weld an iron bridge or caress a child's head. It possesses the power to both harm and heal.

RACHOFF WAS FOURTEEN when the devout old Timofei, a dealer in wheat and a guest in his father's house, laid a blessing on him. Taking the young man's hands in his, Timofei reverently made the sign of the cross on them and said, "Vassili Ossipovich Rachoff, I hereby set a seal on your two hands, that you may never use them for anything evil, impure, or shameful, but only to comfort, give, and heal. Your hands shall rest tenderly on brows furrowed with pain and care; they shall gently rub weary backs. They shall carry food, drink, and warm clothes to the poor. They shall be a blessing to everyone."

Deeply stirred, Rachoff knelt before the old man for a long time, his large, earnest eyes searching the wooden floor, his ears reddening with a sense of inadequacy. Timofei's words had struck him and sunk quickly to the depths, and yet he could still hear their echoes, their strange and wonderful sound. What did they mean?

Timofei turned and went, and not long afterward he died. But his words did not die. “Your hands shall be a blessing to everyone.” That was at once a consecration and a call. God himself had put the words into Timofei’s mouth, and they had power. Power to change and to purify. Power to grant a vision that grew ever clearer.

Rachoff was born in 1861, the son of a respected citizen in Archangelsk, a city far in the North between the vast Russian tundra and the White Sea. Like Timofei, his father was a grain merchant, though well-to-do. Rachoff grew up in his father’s large, stone townhouse near the harbor and was expected to follow in his father’s footsteps. After he turned seventeen he was apprenticed to a family friend, a merchant who owned a large German export firm, and every day he went to this man’s house to learn all he could about commerce.

Though successful, Rachoff’s master was not a worldly man but a sincere believer who was more concerned with inner, rather than outer, things. On Rachoff’s eighteenth birthday, he presented the young man with a Bible. Looking at him intently he said, “You are as a son to me, dear Rachoff, and I have long wished to seal your eyes as a father would. See clearly when you read this book. Everything depends on it. If your eyes are not truly open, you may as well be blind.” Then he blessed Rachoff, saying: “I seal your eyes as a father would, so that God’s Word is not an obstacle to you but a source of comfort, wisdom, and peace. Your eyes shall see nothing in this holy book but Jesus’ power and great love.” Rachoff stood there, startled and perplexed as the strange word “seal” rang again in his ears. What could it mean?

Soon Rachoff was reading the Bible almost every evening. He had to read it secretly, for his father, an Orthodox believer who felt that the study of God’s Word was better left to priests, would not have approved. But that did not matter, for the merchant’s words were true: Jesus spoke to him from every page—and not only spoke, but turned

his life upside down, robbing him of complacency and setting him on edge. And that is how it should be, because it is written, “He who draws near to me draws near to the fire.”

The next winter a distant cousin moved into the city with his family. He was a poor man and did not wait long to inform Rachoff’s father where he lived and how he was related, so one Sunday after dinner, Rachoff’s father, who was tired of his pestering, set out with his son to visit the man and see for themselves whether something could be done.

As they entered the house—really a squalid, cavern-like cellar—they saw that the entire family of seven lived in one room. The children huddled in it were famished and half-naked, and the floor so dirty it made Rachoff’s skin creep. The man motioned them to take seats in two peeling painted chairs, and as he did, his wife darted forward to wipe a brown smear from one of them. Rachoff grimaced, then sat down anyway. What else was there to do? He looked around. There was one window, a small, high opening in one wall, but the light it let in was wan, and the draft that seeped from it sour and chilly.

Rachoff’s father sent for food from a nearby inn, and meat was brought. As soon as it came, the man, hunger-crazed, thrust his fingers into it, snatched up a piece, and devoured it. The rest of the family followed suit. It was a dreadful sight, one Rachoff would never forget. What filth—what degradation! His heart tightened at the sight of such broken, animal-like beings. And to think that they were his own relatives!

That evening his thoughts kept turning to Jesus. For was it not Jesus who had forced his eyes open, searing them as if with sparks flung from a burning fire? He broke down, weeping. What would Jesus have done? Waves of shame rolled over him, for he knew the answer. His hands would have soothed and healed and given blessing.

After that night new insights burst upon Rachoff at every turn, driving him forward and dismantling every cherished and long-held as-

sumption. Even the church brought him no peace. Previously the bells had rung out sweetly, dispelling all his troubles and inspiring him to prayer. Now their chimes unsettled him, reminding him only of the bishop's endless wealth, and the grinding poverty of the peasants who flocked to hear him. Previously the statues of the saints had awed him, as did the candles (some weighing a hundred pounds and costing a thousand rubles apiece), the gilded images, and the wall hangings. Now, however, he saw that such beauty was really a pious distraction from reality—from the wretchedness of the poor who sought comfort in its intoxicating veil.

At length, driven by his disquiet, Rachoff attempted his first act of charity. It was a gray, rainy day in February, and from his window he saw a ragged old man tottering along the street. Without a word to anyone, he went out and called the beggar into his room, bathed him, dressed him in clean clothes, fed him, and offered him his own bed. Stupefied, the man stared first at Rachoff, then at his fine furniture, then at the tapestries on his walls. He shook his head. Rachoff, equally tongue-tied, let him go—and with him, his gold watch, as he was embarrassed to discover the next morning.

After this incident, a period of disillusionment set in, and Rachoff began to doubt the value of generosity. For a while he even adopted his father's way of thinking, whereby the poor were all classed as one kind: cheats and liars responsible for their own plight; undeserving riffraff who had no sense of what it meant to earn money.

Yet Jesus continued to work in him, and soon Rachoff was again restless and unable to find peace. In his turmoil he went to a Marxist, a preacher who believed that the State would one day be replaced by a just economic system and a citizenry of equals. Such was his dream. At first Rachoff was attracted by his oratory, but when he realized that the man was intent on seizing political power, by armed struggle if necessary, he turned away. The Jesus he knew was a humble man.

IN 1881, WHEN RACHOFF was twenty, his old master, the merchant, sent him to manage a sugar-beet factory in a village not far from the city. Rachoff was happy to go, but after a year and a half the desolate, unending landscape began to depress him, as did his employees, many of them uncouth peasants given to heavy drinking and wild behavior. Rachoff tried hard to reform them, but nothing he did seemed to work.

Then he met Irina Nesterova. The wife of a peasant farmer and dealer, Irina was a kindly, bespectacled little woman of about fifty, and a devoted disciple of Jesus. When she spoke her eyes shone, and her warmth of heart and kindly voice won over everyone who met her, including Rachoff. Four families lived in Irina's house, and though they had once been rough and disorderly, their manners had gradually yielded to her steady calm. Irina belonged to a small group of believers, and once a week (on Fridays, the day Jesus died) she gathered its members at her house, where they frankly confessed their sins, encouraged one another, and prayed and sang.

Unlike the upper half of the village, where Rachoff's factory stood, Irina's half—the so-called lower village—was transformed by her. When someone was sick, she visited him. On cold days she brought tea to the laborers in the fields; on hot days she carried them water. When a woman was beaten by her drunken husband, Irina would be the first one at the house, mellowing him with friendly gestures and then admonishing him with firm words. In Irina, the spirit of Jesus was at work.

"Little mother," Rachoff asked her one day, "What are your teachings? What are your beliefs about God, about the rich and poor?"

"In my eyes they all live in bondage," Irina replied, "the rich just as much as the poor."

"The rich!" exclaimed Rachoff. "How can they be, when they live in such warmth and comfort?"

"No one is free just because he has possessions," said Irina. "And money does not necessarily mean wealth. Yes, even the richest man is

poor. And so is every other being. The whole creation moans under the weight of a terrible sadness. The earth itself cries out as if in pain. There is sighing among the animals and the trees, in the springs and the rocks, in the fire and the stars. But Jesus will come. He hears every groan, and he will come to rescue us from our grief. His spirit heals and reconciles and blesses; it comes to us and dwells in our midst, and it can—through grace and hard work—pry us free from our bondage and make us like children.”

“Children?” Rachoff puzzled.

“Yes, children.” Irina repeated. “True children are joyous, whether they are fed with a hundred rubles or three kopeks a day, for the spirit of Jesus lives within them.”

“You are right, Mother Irina,” said Rachoff. “I remember my friends, the Lupkins of Archangelsk, whose son is ill all the time. He suffers from a chest infection and has undergone surgery many times, but nothing will help him, so wrapped up he is in his own misery. His sister is healthy, but just as unhappy. Spoiled and bored, she stands hour after hour at the window, dreary and sullen, though surrounded by comforts and possessions of every kind. Their parents are both given to bad moods and violent quarrels, and even on the best days they live in a state of continual nervous tension.”

Irina nodded. “There is coldness wherever people are not yet healed by the Spirit. But how different it can be with Jesus! You know my Natasha. She’s been bedridden for three years with tuberculosis, but never cries or complains. She’s rarely unhappy, for she is filled with hope and love.”

Rachoff listened to her words, and longing for the same spirit, asked her, “Give me your blessing, Mother Irina.”

“Gladly,” she answered, “I will set a seal on your heart.” And with that she made the sign of the cross over his heart, saying, “Jesus alone

shall rule in this heart. Away with all sadness and complaining! Come, spirit of God, dwell here within this man, and grow until he is filled with your purifying love.”

Rachoff trembled and his eyes welled with tears, for it was now three times that he had been thus blessed. A threefold seal! And now it was clear to him what it meant. His hands must become like Jesus’ hands: tender, and eager to serve. His eyes must become like Jesus’ eyes: clear, loving, and sincere. Finally, his heart must become one with Jesus’ heart, finding peace in the Father with the same trust and certainty that Jesus had.

Youth is never clear sailing, however, and many storms still lay ahead for Rachoff. He confronted greed and cruelty, self-righteousness, lust, and deceit, yet still he did not fully accept the task that had been laid on him. And though he knew he must serve Jesus, it seemed as though the Master did not welcome his attention, but stood constantly at his shoulder, wielding the whip of another exacting demand, calling him to sacrifice and give still more. What torment it brought him! For Rachoff did not yet see how everything that opposes God must be destroyed within a man before he can find peace, and before there is release from the anguish of unanswered searching.

Back in Archangelsk, Rachoff was consumed both with a feeling of restlessness and a premonition of approaching fulfillment. He was twenty-two now, and his mother meant to find him a wife. In fact, she claimed to have found one—a kind and well-off woman. But things turned out quite differently.

One autumn night, after hours of inner striving, Rachoff had a dream. In it he saw a fallow field stretching far into the distance, sloping gently upward until it met the sky. Suddenly a shining light appeared above the horizon and began to move slowly toward him. He saw that the radiance surrounded a simply dressed, yet noble figure, a man in a

brown robe, guiding a plow and coming down the newly turned furrow. The man was not alone, but accompanied by an adoring throng.

All at once the air was pierced by a sound—the thin, steady tone of a bow being drawn across the string of a violin. Or was it the muted cry of a baby? The man at the plow looked up and listened. The crowd held its breath. The sound was coming from a nearby hut. The man walked over and entered it.

Rachoff followed, and saw that the sound was coming from a baby. Silent, he watched as the man gathered it up and kissed it, at which the crying stopped. A natural gesture, one might think. But it was so tender, so infinitely compassionate, that Rachoff was moved to tears. Stumbling blindly back out of the hut, he returned to the crowd. It had changed to a mob, and the cheers to contemptuous scoffing.

Rachoff was unable to stop weeping. He could not have explained it, but he had just seen what he had longed for through all the years of his unrest. He had seen Jesus—Jesus, stooping to pick up a little child.

Suddenly Rachoff was wide awake. Jumping from his bed, he knelt down on the floor and gave fervent thanks for his dream; then, with nothing but the clothes on his back, he slipped silently out of his parents' house.

The moon was bright; a soft breeze tousled his hair. He strode down the road with a light, glad step. Once he stood still for a moment, contemplating the meaning of his vision, but then his heart rose high within him, and he stepped out again, even more briskly. This was no time to interpret a dream. He had seen Jesus—that was all that mattered—and Jesus was no longer a goad, a piercing arrow, a source of unrest. He was a well of peace, a fire of love, a sun of joy. He was cause for unbroken praise.

Gratitude and exultation swept over Rachoff. He broke into a run, and ran on and on toward the dawn, shouting into the darkness and

the springing wind, "Brother Jesus, here I am. I am coming! I am coming!"

FOR FIVE DAYS RACHOFF traveled eastward, until he reached the district capital of Pinega, and on the sixth day he walked further, to Radinovka, a village of poor workers. Twilight was falling when he came, and a light autumn rain stirred the dust of the unpaved streets.

In front of the first house Rachoff passed he met a rough-looking woman with untidy red hair, driving a herd of pigs.

"Is there a holy man in the village?" he asked.

"Yes, there's a dear old father here," she replied. "He usually prays and sings, but he's lying sick just now. Come with me."

The woman brought Rachoff into a nearby house, and there he found an old man with swollen feet, lying near a brick stove with his legs wrapped in a fleece.

"Tell me, dear brother, are you a man of God?" Rachoff asked him. "I greet you with joy in the name of Jesus Christ. What is your name? Mine is Rachoff."

"My greetings to you, too, wandering brother," replied the man. "But how sad that you have a name. I have no name; I am nameless."

"What do you mean by that, my brother?" asked Rachoff.

"The one who is above is nameless," the man returned, pointing upwards. Then, pointing to himself, he went on, "And the one who is above is the one who lives here. The two are one and the same. I am a part of him, a part of the nameless one. That is what Gregor Petrov told me when I was in Tambov with the army. Gregor was a God-fearing peasant, and he read this in a holy book, written in the holy language and given to him by a venerable man."

"Come here to me, and I will make you better, dear Father Nameless," Rachoff said.

The old man obeyed, and Rachoff took a bucket of warm water from the stove and washed and massaged his legs. He was like a child, Rachoff thought.

“What else was written in the holy book, dear Father Nameless?” he inquired.

“It said, my dear friend, that true faith is a daily fight, and fasting a good aid in overcoming the flesh. It said, too, that men should live singly and pure, like the angels in heaven. Even if they are married, they ought to abstain, praying until every desire is conquered, and doing so with the help of a copper cross around their neck. Look, here is mine!”

At this the old man tugged at his crucifix, then went on: “One day judgment will come, and God’s people will be counted, and only those will be saved who wear a cross, like I do.”

The old man rambled on, talking now wisely and now foolishly, while Rachoff finished tending to his sores. Night had come, and the room was filling with curious women and children. The men were at the tavern. Later Rachoff knelt and prayed with his listeners, and read to them from the gospels.

Afterward the women returned to their shacks, and then the men returned, stumbling in the dark, beating their wives and children, and causing one petulant outburst after another. Rachoff sat in the darkness and listened to their angry shouts, waiting for the uproar to subside. He knew now that this was the place for him to stay.

Rachoff stayed two years in Radinovka, going from house to house and sharing in the work of the villagers. Above all he chose jobs that no one else wanted to do. He helped care for the sick, scrubbed dirty wooden floors, scraped molding walls and whitewashed them, cleansed neglected animals, and shoveled out overflowing stalls.

He taught the children to speak Russian, for they knew only the local dialect, and how to read and write. He also read the gospel to them

and told them stories about Jesus, saying, "It is not enough to have his image in a little shrine in a corner of the house. We must keep him in our eyes and hands, and in our hearts."

In the evenings he gathered the villagers and strengthened them in faith, teaching them that not asceticism—not fasting or abstaining—but Jesus alone is the power that overcomes the world. They took his words to heart, and as they did, the men were weaned from their drunken ways, and the women from their gossip and backbiting. Eyes became gentler, hands more peaceable, and words kinder and more understanding. Husbands stopped mistreating their wives, who in turn showed new respect to them, and children began to honor and obey their parents.

Before long Rachoff was accepted as a friend throughout the village. Even the smallest children were entrusted to his care, and though he was only twenty-four, they fondly called him Father Vassili.

But there was one exception. When Rachoff had arrived in Radinovka, the Orthodox priest had kept to his home, suffering from an infectious disease. No one was willing to look after him, not even his wife, so frightened was she of contagion. Only Rachoff was courageous enough to visit him, and he brought hot compresses and eased his inflammation. Eventually Rachoff's attentive care cured him.

Others might have thanked him, but the priest did not. Jealous of Rachoff's popularity and suspicious that his kindness was really a ruse to get him out of bed and back to work, he looked on the young man with growing mistrust. As for the young man's condemnation of strong drink, it made him fairly bristle, for there was little he loved like the bottle. "Have you any idea, little brother," he would complain, "what a sacrifice it is for me to sit here year after year in this godforsaken place, toiling and half starving, stranded with a wife and children, surrounded by nothing but the frozen wastes? Over in Pinega, my hometown, I was

a man among men. Here I am a man among swine, and drinking is my only salvation. With it I can at least escape this miserable hole for a while and fly back to my good friends—back to the days of my youth. Wine is the gift of a good God. Why, it is even praised in the Psalms!”

To which Rachoff replied, “That may be so, but if you would stop drinking and turn Radinovka from the hellhole you describe into a place of warmth and love—into a garden for Jesus—you would no longer hate your life, or want to flee it in a drunken fog.”

“A garden for Jesus?” retorted the priest, rolling his eyes. “That’s just what infuriates me about you. You talk of nothing but Jesus. Always Jesus! It’s enough to make one think you’re from a sect. Can’t you see that the peasants are too thickheaded for him? Find me one who’s not a shameless rascal. The two don’t go together. Praying is religion enough. Anyone can do it.”

“No,” insisted Rachoff, “it is not enough. A Jesus who is only there for people to pray to is an idol in the clouds, and what good is that? We must help each villager to receive him into his heart, his eyes, his hands. We must let his love live right here among us. He is already at work. Look at Taras, or at Anissa. Look at almost every other. Jesus has made his home with them; they have become sons and daughters of God.”

But the priest continued to mistrust him. It didn’t help much that the peasants now recoiled from him in disgust as he staggered along the street, cursing or guffawing, and reeking of cheap wine. In earlier days they had hurried to him, confiding in him as one of their own. They had drunk and joked with him; they had kissed his hand. And now...now they turned to Rachoff, that intruder from Archangelsk. Oh, what wouldn’t he give to be rid of him!

One day about half a year later a government order arrived from Pinega, forbidding Rachoff to remain in the village. The women wept, and the men, too, broke down when they heard the news. Only Ra-

choff remained calm. "It is only I, a twenty-five-year-old man of no consequence, who has been banned. Jesus still remains in Radinovka; he can still work among you. Only I am journeying on."

Rachoff set out for Archangelsk again, and when he arrived back home, it was May. Everywhere the wintry tundra was carpeted in green. Alder catkins nodded along the water, and flowers bloomed; the fresh turned furrows breathed with new life. In later years Rachoff's mother would look back on it as a heavenly spring: her son was home, and she could once more care for him. And what was more, Rachoff, who had previously resisted every gesture, now allowed her to show love to him.

Then, as suddenly as he had come, Rachoff disappeared. He did so without a word, leaving only a terse note: "Jesus is calling, and I must answer." And then: "Jesus is still with you." That was all he wrote.

When his mother found the sheet of paper Rachoff was already long gone. His gait was confident and upright; his bearded face weathered, creased by sunshine, wind, and rain. He crossed new vistas daily, for he aimed to wander all of Russia. Everywhere, people were drawn by his love, and loved him in return. And whether they admitted it or not, everyone felt his blessing who returned his earnest gaze.

Rachoff demonstrated his love in practical ways. In each village he came to, he pulled out his cache of tools—hammer and nails, handsaw, knife, and string—and offered his services to any who would take them. When a goat broke into a widow's garden, he mended the fence for her; when a cripple ran short of winter fuel, he split firewood for a day. Once he cared for a sickly young woman until she was strong enough to hold her newborn child. Another time he sat with a dying old man until his last breath. Rachoff told him so vividly about the joys of the world beyond that the man thought an angel had come to him.

"You are sure it is not a place of darkness and decay?" he asked about death.

“Oh no!” Rachoff reassured him. “You are about to enter the fullness of life—a glorious, bright morning as brilliant as the sun at Easter.” And as Rachoff went on to describe the beauty of the heavenly realm, the man grew more and more peaceful, so that at the end he was happy, even eager to pass into the land of eternal spring.

SOMETIMES PEOPLE JOINED Rachoff for a stretch along the road. Once two devoted young women, friends who had heard his call to serve, even followed him for several weeks. They begged food and cooked for him, washed his tunic and mended his cloak. They might never have left his side, had he not shaken himself loose from them. Crowds often came after him as he left a village where he had stayed, but though kindly and gentle, he always evaded them. Before long a rumor was circulating that Jesus himself was journeying through Russia. And truly, his behavior and speech were so selfless, so pure, that Jesus’ spirit did shine from him, penetrating many a heart and bearing good fruit.

Once in the far southern reaches of Russia, Rachoff came upon a sect led by a certain Jacob Istomin, who asked him, “Are you one of us?”

“That depends who you are, dear brother,” replied Rachoff warmly.

“We are wanderers, travelers, pilgrims,” said the man. “We go from place to place. An ascetic named Ivan taught us that a true worshipper of God is continually on the run from the Antichrist. And so we move on ceaselessly, for the whole world is ruled by the Antichrist, our enemy from the beginning, and all priests and ministers and soldiers are his servants. We are unable to resist them in battle, so we flee on and on, across the endless plains of our native land, and through the vast and kindly forests.

“We have broken all ties with church and state, and disdain all excuses for contact with the world. We refuse to pay taxes, to serve in the

army, to obey government authorities, to respect bishops or priests. We have no use for documents such as passports, but tear them up or burn them. Money is meaningless to us, and we never keep any on hand. We depend on the devout. They give us food and clothing enough.

“The only thing we honor is the small cross that each of us carries. See, here is mine. Look what is written on it—it was endorsed in Jerusalem itself. That is the only real passport, for what are true Christians but pilgrims and strangers in this life? And is it not so, that only those who escape the world will not be condemned to destruction with it?”

Rachoff listened quietly until the man was finished. Then, humbly but passionately, he began to speak, reminding Jacob Istomin of the simple love of Jesus, and showing up his own complex ideas as delusion: “Jesus is the true king over the earth, and it is he, not the Antichrist, who shall have the final say. Jesus reigns wherever people welcome him, and wherever this happens, the Antichrist will sense his active, living presence, and turn and flee.

“It is not the disciples of Jesus, but the followers of the Antichrist, who are always on the run. No, Jesus’ disciples hold their ground with valiant and determined hearts. Jesus builds up, gathers, and affirms. You tear down; you scatter; you run and hide. Jesus blesses; you curse. Jesus unites; you divide. Jesus heals and comforts; he brings peace, joy, and love; and wherever he rules, the Antichrist gives way to him. Kneel down, proud man! Kneel to Jesus! He alone has power!”

In the end, Jacob Istomin saw the truth of Rachoff’s words and followed after him, though eventually Rachoff threw him off his trail.

Down by the Sea of Asov, at the mouth of a great river, Rachoff met a withered old hermit named Abrossim. An anchorite who made his home in a cave, Abrossim was well versed in the lives of the saints and, after the manner of one of them, believed that peace was found only by withdrawing from the daily affairs of men.

Abrossim went down to the river each day to catch the fish he lived on; otherwise, he spent his hours in contemplation and prayer. At mid-day he danced in the gray-green grasses of the steppe, circling slowly on the top of the hill, long beard streaming, cloak fluttering in the wind. That symbolized the dancing of the saints and friends of God on the holy meadows of Paradise. At evening he knelt down in front of his cave, gazing in rapture at the eternal movement of the stars. That symbolized the adoration to come, the holy time when all men will behold God. At midnight he lay down in a grave that he had dug for himself. That symbolized dying, and the importance of readiness for death. Then, on the following morning, he began the day by bowing, then running toward the sunrise, his hands uplifted in prayer. That symbolized resurrection. So every day Abrossim lived in expectation, acting out a parable of man's passage from this life to the next.

When Rachoff found the anchorite, however, he lay sick, so Rachoff stayed in the cave for several weeks, caring for him and learning a great deal. When they parted, the old man wept and said: "You have been like a mother to me, dear brother. Ancient as I am, I thought of my own mother when you tended me with your gentle hands. I thank you for your love. Oh, how I wish my life were still before me, so I might go out as you do and, in the strength of Jesus, fill the whole world with his spirit! But I cannot. So receive my blessing, and give me yours."

Rachoff traveled on, learning, teaching, and healing as he went. Finally he left Russia and made his way to Jerusalem. Once there, he wandered the city and took in its storied sights, but though deeply moved, he was at the same time heartbroken. Everywhere the poor pilgrims were shamefully exploited, and it wasn't the hucksters but the priests who cheated them the worst. With deep pain, he recognized that, holy as it was, Jerusalem had no room for Jesus. Just as the city had rejected him in the past, so it did now. Judas, the betrayer, would have felt right at home.

One day, while watching a great procession, Rachoff could hold back his indignation no more. A Greek patriarch, seated on a white, silken throne borne aloft by four strong priests, was making his way down the street. Trumpets sounded, and the procession moved like a white cloud toward a magnificent church.

Following the throng inside, Rachoff watched as the patriarch was reverently lowered in front of the gold encrusted altar. Then, rising to his full height, he cried out, "You on the white throne, Jesus is calling you! If you are a shepherd, then take care of your flock! Look how your sheepdogs are treating the sheep: they are scattering the ewes and devouring the lambs. Woe to such dogs! And woe to the shepherd who cannot control them!"

Everyone stood petrified by this outburst. Blood reddened cheeks; faces burned with shame. But the bold young stranger's words hit home to many. How many of them had traveled from great distances, simple, perhaps, and poor, but devout in their longing? And how many more pinched and scraped for years, hoping to nourish their souls by walking where Christ had walked on earth? And here, at the end of it all, what awaited them other than greedy priests who demanded coins for every foolish rite: gold to touch the hole where the cross had stood, silver to kiss the place where the sacred body had lain, copper to have a candle lit, or to place a hand in the crack of some holy temple wall! It was a just denunciation, they knew, and they began to tremble.

Meanwhile the rash heckler was seized by guards who pulled him from the gaping crowd and dragged him outside and away. Throwing Rachoff in a fortress room, they left him imprisoned for a day and a night, with nothing but a jug of water to sustain him.

Yet he was not forgotten. At morning, as a cool breeze ran through the alleys, a young woman stood under his barred window—a pilgrim who had found him after many hours of searching. Craning her neck

to see into the dark opening, she pled, "Oh, where are you, my Jesus? If only I might see you, here in this city where your feet once trod!" Rachoff did not answer, but fell on his knees in the gloom, shaken and humbled to his very depths.

BANNED FROM THE HOLY LAND, Rachoff traveled north again, until he reached the great city of Odessa on the Black Sea. Everywhere, lavish displays of wealth met his eyes: imposing mansions on broad, tree-lined boulevards; expensive cafes filled with laughing women and haughty men; luxurious hotels for travelers from faraway places such as Paris and Berlin.

There were magnificent parks, too, bright with roses and oleanders and freshened by fountains and pools. In one square Rachoff passed a towering glass sunroom. Behind its windows, elegantly attired visitors strolled among potted date palms and orange trees, plucking ripe fruit as they went. In another he passed a well-tended garden in which a maid sat grooming a miniature dog. Beside her, exotic, fantailed fish swam in a tiny pond whose sides and bottom appeared to be painted with gold leaf.

But that was not all he saw. On the outskirts of the city, only half an hour's walk away, he found coal yards and slaughterhouses, and beyond them, shacks, tents, and mud. Here lived Odessa's homeless poor on bare fields allotted to them by the authorities.

Drunken men stumbled through puddles, and bitter-eyed women hauled pails of brackish water. Gaunt children and wizened crones poked about in steaming garbage heaps (the city's daily refuse, carted out by horse) and stuffed their pickings into sacks. The food was scanty and only remotely edible—vegetable peels, meat bones and other half-rotten scraps—but they hoarded it as if it were gold. Rachoff was horrified.

Still, despite the acrid odors and the raucous, tattered crowds; despite the grubby boys and girls who flung themselves at Rachoff, vying for his attention and clamoring for coins; despite the clouds of mosquitoes, and the mangy, yapping dogs—or was it because of all these?—he knew he must stay.

At first the squatters stared when they saw he meant to take up quarters with them. Then they mocked him, especially when he spoke of Jesus, whom they scoffed at with foul gestures and jeers. But Rachoff was not easily discouraged. Knowing that God's love is best shown in deeds, he did not try to convince them with words. Eventually he stopped talking altogether. For the next half year, he said almost nothing to anyone. Diligently, silently, and simply, he brought Jesus to the people through his hands, eyes, and heart.

Rachoff helped here, there, and everywhere. In spring he begged planks and nails, rakes, hoes, and seeds from a kindly woman of means, and with her gifts built sheds and straightened paths, dug gardens and sowed vegetables. Soon even the most suspicious no longer looked at him askance, but offered their time and help.

Then, in one night, it all came to an end. Vandals burned his lumber, broke his tools, and scattered his supplies. They even uprooted his seedlings and plants. Heartbroken, Rachoff went back to the donor and threw himself at her feet. This time she refused to help him. Meanwhile the squatters lost confidence in him as well, and on his return they treated him with contempt.

That night Rachoff sequestered himself and prayed for hours. He remained alone the next day too. Then, in the evening, he went into Odessa, to the heart of its grandeur: the opera house.

Rachoff could not have looked more out of place in the brightly lit square. It was opening night, and everywhere he turned, there was wealth to be seen. Ornate, horse-drawn carriages came and went, dis-

bursing smiling ladies in evening gowns. Trim escorts breezed by in tails and top hats; ivory canes tapped paving stones; jewels glinted; glasses clinked. But he did not hesitate. Mounting the imposing marble steps, he climbed them, bought (with his last savings) a ticket for a front seat, and walked boldly into the great baroque hall.

Inside, the splendor almost overwhelmed him. Upholstered red seats were filling with well-to-do patrons, and from the velvet-covered balcony boxes above them, cologne wafted down. The air vibrated with titters of anticipation.

Near Rachoff's chair, it is true, the mood was decidedly different. As he seated himself, there was silence, and then looks of revulsion and disbelief. Who was this filthy scoundrel, this unwashed tramp? Who had let him in? Why didn't someone throw him out? Tongues clicked indignantly, and someone called for an usher, but it was too late. Already the lights were going out, the curtain lifting. The performance had begun.

Rachoff sat quietly, praying, through the first act. Then, as the curtain fell, he rose suddenly to his feet. Stepping calmly onto his chair, he turned to the audience and spoke in a strong, clear voice.

"Hear me, for Jesus' sake! Rich brothers, rich sisters, for his sake listen quietly to a poor servant of Jesus. If you knew half of what I have seen outside this city, it would bring tears to every kind eye, wrench every compassionate heart. What misery there is; what destitution! Your fellow humans there—no, your brothers—they live like wild animals. Your lapdogs live better than their children! But it need not be so, and wouldn't be, if you shared even a smidgen of your food and clothing, your warmth, comfort, power, or education with them."

There was silence in the great hall, and then a commotion as several guards entered from the back and began to make their way toward Rachoff. He went on, louder: "In a moment I will be removed. But let me first beg you to take this simple message to heart: Jesus is crying out

in grief. Jesus is waiting for you to act. May Jesus plant his seed of love within you, and stir every man and woman of good will!”

Then, turning to the guards, who had just surrounded him, Rachoff stretched out his arms. “Here are my hands,” he cried. Until this moment, the audience had remained as still as death, but now an astonished murmur rose. Opera glasses were trained on him, and hundreds stood. Few saw his face as he was led away, but those who did said it shone with joy. And those nearest him heard him whisper, as if to himself, “Thank you, dear Jesus, for standing by me.”

After his arrest, Rachoff was dragged off to prison, and for weeks nothing more was heard of him. But the uproar he had already caused animated dinner parties and made headlines for days. “A Blow Struck for Jesus.” “Madman at the Opera.” “Lunatic, or Early Christian?” “A Conspirator for Christ.” It was mostly nervous excitement, and after a while the papers lost interest in the story. Some first exploited it shamelessly, of course: one reporter investigated the squatters’ camp and wrote the most twisted piece, praising its primitivism and waffling about the “serenity of life untouched by modern complications.”

Yet here and there the seeds Rachoff had planted took root and began to grow. Certain reform-minded citizens were so horrified by the poverty they found on the outskirts of town that they rallied the city fathers for measures of relief, pressed local merchants for building supplies and food, and continued to agitate until housing was improved, filth cleared, streets paved, and schools established.

Rachoff never saw the fruits of their work. Charged with inciting a riot, tried, convicted, and banned, he was long gone from Odessa, and out on the steppes, alone with the grass and the sheltering sky, alone with the songbirds in the clear, blue air.

TURNING UP SOME TIME LATER in Kiev, or rather in the slums on its

outskirts, Rachoff, who was now about thirty, continued to work with the poor. He still spoke of Jesus, too, though his words mostly fell on deaf ears. "Here in Kiev we don't need your Jesus," people told him, shaking their heads or elbowing him good-naturedly. "We have the saints; they're good enough to save the likes of us."

It was true. Kiev did have saints, and plenty of them, as Rachoff soon learned. His guide was Mironoff, a steward in the Lavra Monastery, and one of the only men in the city interested in Rachoff's stories of Jesus.

"Deep in the cellars," Mironoff told him, "lie the saints in which the poor have such great faith. There are hundreds of them. But they are not really saints. They are the embalmed bodies of dead pilgrims and monks, or effigies with heads of wax, and clothing stuffed with wood shavings or straw. The bodies lie one apiece on biers covered with black altar cloths; they are dressed in fine silk, embroidered with silver and gold." Rachoff shuddered. But the next day, after gathering his courage, he joined a troop of worshipers as they entered the underground vaults.

At the entrance stood a corpulent monk with a whip in his hand, demanding the so-called offering without which no one could go in. After pocketing the pilgrim's coins, the monk instructed them not to touch the saints, not to do this, not to do that. The only thing they could do was kiss the saints on the soles of their feet.

Rachoff burned with anger. He looked around at the peasants kneeling everywhere. He breathed in the clamminess of the morgue-like air. He peered at the motionless figures, a cross in each pair of ashen hands, hair combed severely back, a hood drawn stiffly over each lifeless head. A colored lamp swung above him, casting dismal, quivering shadows; a burning censer moved in slow, steady arcs.

Suddenly Rachoff knelt down and called on Jesus in a loud voice,

beseeking him to reveal the trickery and put an end to the vile show. Then he sprang up, snatched the whip from the gaping monk, and turned towards the pilgrims. With one kick he knocked a stuffed figure from its platform. "Look!" he cried, as it fell apart in a cloud of shavings. "Here's a good idol for you! Out with you, poor blinded creatures! Out of this cavern of lies!" And he cracked his whip so furiously that the pilgrims fled in terror, the fat monk screaming at their heels.

Rachoff fled the ensuing confusion, but during the night he was found and seized. Lying in prison, he awaited the day of his trial. He planned to defend himself with Holy Writ itself: "Jesus instituted the lash as a sacrament," he would say. "It is a tool with which to drive out hypocrites and liars. And Jesus' disciples, too, must wield it. That is all I have done."

Rachoff spent many days behind bars, but he remained courageous and full of cheer. He knew that the seeds he had planted would remain in the soil of every open heart, and in time they would grow into healing herbs. He planted seeds in the prison too. Formerly the guards had treated the inmates as wild beasts. Now a few, softened by Rachoff's kindness, and made vulnerable by his love, began to see them as brothers—fallen, but still their own kind.

Some even approached Rachoff in his cell, wanting to know how they could find happiness for themselves. But he only said: "We must be hated for Jesus' sake. Suffering is a badge of honor to me." And this was true, for whenever Rachoff met with new humiliations or indignities, he did not grumble, but laughed: "Another medal, then!" That was the secret of his indestructible joy.

Rachoff was never brought to trial, for in order to avoid the shame of public exposure, the monastery decided to suppress the incident. Eventually he was released and banished to his hometown, Archangelsk.

At first he stayed at his father's house. Then he moved into the city,

where he walked the poorest districts from morning till night, listening and comforting, teaching and offering a helping hand. In this street he bought books and taught the people to write; in the next he gathered the children and read to them from the Gospels. In one alley he made peace between a quarrelling couple; in another he found decent work for a prostitute. Wherever he went he spread Jesus' love, though also his sharpness against lust and deceit. That never earned him praise, of course, but only angry kicks and blows.

With money given him by his parents, Rachoff rented two rooms in the worst place he could find, converted them, and opened a simple restaurant. Even his admirers were skeptical of this venture, for he had no steady source of income. But he did have faith, and that proved sufficient. "Do something for Jesus," was all he ever asked. And he rarely made such an appeal without receiving enough to buy food and fuel, and pay his monthly dues besides.

No meat or alcohol was served at Rachoff's table—no alcohol because it led to drunkenness; no meat because he opposed the slaughter of animals for food. Meals began only when everyone present was seated, and then with a prayer or a few verses from the Bible. Afterward, Rachoff said a blessing: "May this food keep you strong in body and soul. And may it not feed anger or a cruelly lifted arm, but only the hand stretched out in love, only the heart lit by Jesus. May your limbs be turned solely to compassionate and selfless deeds. May your spirit reflect solely the spirit of Jesus."

Word spread, and soon Rachoff was feeding more than a hundred people every day. Many came not only to satisfy their physical hunger but also because they sought comfort, and found it in his words.

Before long, however, shop owners made nervous by the downtrodden hordes alerted the authorities, and citing failure to comply with city regulations, they closed the little restaurant, and then shuttered it

for good.

Rachoff was undeterred. "I may be defeated," he said, "Yet Jesus never is. He goes on from victory to victory, and no one can hinder him." And so he went on as confidently as ever.

It was winter now, but he was up with the sun every morning, loading a large sled with provisions and making his way through the drifts. "Perhaps I cannot gather the hungry for food," he explained, "But no one can stop me from carrying it to them." From one wretched house to another he went, pausing to unpack whatever the inhabitants needed most—bread, flour, wood, or coal; sugar or salt; tea or blankets—and then leaving again before they could ask his name.

In one place Rachoff found the men especially coarse and given to drink. Staying with them, he soon found out why: a tavern near the sawmill where most of them worked sold liquor on credit. Many families had been destroyed, and many more faced ruin. He decided to intervene. Arriving at the mill each day before the first shift began, he gathered the workers and led them in prayer. He also set up a fund for mutual aid, organized the purchase of allotments for gardens, and encouraged those who could to further their studies.

Later, with a sizable contribution from the owners of the sawmill, who were impressed by Rachoff's influence on their workers (and by their increased productivity, now that they no longer drank), he founded an orphanage. Or so people said. Rachoff himself insisted, as he did about everything, that Jesus was behind it all: "I only oversaw construction."

At first the orphanage took in only street urchins, of whom there were plenty in the city; later it also welcomed children from families who couldn't make ends meet. Eventually it held some forty boys and girls. Rachoff cared for his charges day and night: teaching and tending them, feeding them, and lulling them to sleep. He sang with them, told

them stories, sorted out arguments, and helped them with their chores. He played and laughed with them; he taught them finger games and rhymes. Visitors remarked at his tenderness and patience—at how a man could be both father and mother at once.

Rachoff encouraged the older children to do at least one good or chivalrous deed every day. “Go out into the streets,” he would say, “and see if there is anyone in need of love. Look out for the old, the weak, the poor, the ill-treated. Do not go by yourselves, but in small groups, and be sure you are back at sunset.”

By evening they were traipsing back in twos and threes, glowing with pride, and eager to report everything they had done: “We helped a granny stack firewood for her stove.” “We washed bad words off a harbor wall!” “We helped a drunk find his way back home.” One had run errands for a housewife; another had sat and stroked a wounded dog; these two had swept glass from a shopkeeper’s floor; those two had carried coal for a sickly old man. All had wished every person they met a good day, and told them that they brought greetings from Jesus.

“EVERYTHING FOR OTHERS, nothing for myself,” and, “Fear no one, love everyone.” These were Rachoff’s mottoes, and he truly lived by them. He shared everything he had with the poor—with “those dearest to Jesus,” as he called them. Once his father gave him a fur coat, but the next day Rachoff met a half-dressed beggar shivering in the street, and gave it to him. And he never wore gloves, even though he was always receiving them from people who noticed his red hands. “Don’t worry about me,” he would say, accepting them, but telling the donor that he planned to pass them on. “The poor hardly know what gloves look like. I can always beg a pair if I really need to.”

There were two other mottoes Rachoff followed as well: “Do not eat if you know of someone who needs the food more than you do,” and, “Do not go to sleep before everyone you know has found a bed.” That

is why he could often be seen at night, roaming the streets and making sure that there was no one without shelter.

By this time there was hardly a citizen in the area who did not know of Rachoff. Most admired him, though some affirmed his goodness secretly, for he was (how should they put it?) so mystical, so eccentric, so naïve. To the poor, of course, he was nothing less than a saint. A few even took him to be the Savior himself, and now and then an old woman would try to kiss his hand. When that happened, it took all Rachoff had to keep from exploding. “How could I be Jesus?” he would passionately exclaim. “I am only a man, whereas Jesus is both man and God. He is eternal. Yes, he lives within me, but I am only a house of clay. I will perish, and when I crumble into dust, Jesus will travel on until he finds a new heart in which to make his home.”

But if the masses in Archangelsk looked up to Rachoff, the authorities (especially the heads of the Orthodox Church) lost little love on him. Unnerved by his growing fame, they shook their heads and muttered of heresy. Then they approached the secret police. After that spies kept watch over his daily activities, though try as they might, they could find no grounds for arrest.

Some people said he spoke against the saints. Yet there stood every icon, displayed in the prescribed way, in a prayer corner hung with red cloth. Others said he used only the Bible, and dismissed all other holy books. Yet when they searched his simple room, nothing heretical could be found; indeed, every book in it bore the seal of official approval.

Nevertheless the evil intrigue continued. Forget the particulars: it was clear to anyone that Rachoff was a deserter of the Church, that his teachings were unorthodox, that his charisma was dangerous, and that he confused all who listened to him with his endless talk of Jesus.

One bright autumn morning Rachoff was unexpectedly seized, charged with heresy, and thrown behind bars. News of his arrest spread like wildfire, and when word got out that he had declined the assistance

of a lawyer—"God will represent me," he reportedly said—the entire city buzzed.

Fortunately for him, his judge (one Engelhardt, the chief officer of the district administration) was a broadminded man. His sympathies lay with Rachoff, and he believed him to be innocent. Indeed, he considered dismissing the case and letting Rachoff go, if only to shake up the "lazy, drunken priests." Yet the law was the law, and proceedings were proceedings, so he brought Rachoff before the bench, duly questioned him about his faith, and demanded that he enlighten the court as to the teachings he espoused.

"My teachings?" Rachoff asked, as if surprised. "I advocate nothing but the teachings of Jesus. My sole aspiration is to follow him. That is my life task, and it is in fact every man's. That is all I have ever taught. But do with me as you like; I do not matter. Jesus has lived in my heart for many years, and from the moment he entered it, I ceased to exist. Rachoff is long dead, though he must yet die a thousand deaths. What of it? Jesus lives, and he is always victorious."

Engelhardt was so deeply moved by these simple words that he sat tongue-tied in his chair, and later he sent wheat cakes and milk to Rachoff's cell, and ordered him released. Yet even this was not enough to save Rachoff, for the same day he was recaptured by the spies of the powerful ecclesial court.

To satisfy the indignant people of Archangelsk, a statement was issued by the Orthodox Church: Rachoff was a revolutionary, and on top of that, insane. He was confusing the faithful and disrupting their lives. None of these charges would have stood the glare of truth, had they been held to its light, but that did not prevent the church authorities from pressing them.

On the one hand it was sloth. As Rachoff himself had once put it, "The wind from the heights is too strong for those who prefer to drowse amid votive candles." On the other, it was guilt, that burden

with which the mildest spring breeze takes on an unkind edge. Finally it was fear: they knew they were hypocrites, and sensed judgment was near. In short, every churchman in Archangelsk knew exactly what drove Rachoff, and it rattled and stung him. It was the spirit of Christ, which those who serve falsehood can neither fathom nor bear.

ON OCTOBER 20, 1894, at eight o'clock in the morning, Rachoff was secretly removed from the city. He was not allowed to bid farewell to anyone. Like his Master he was thirty-three years old. One month later and a thousand kilometers to the south, the forbidding dungeon of the Susdal Monastery received him into its silence.

Tears were shed in Archangelsk when word of his banishment reached those who loved him. For his parents, the news was a mortal blow. Three months later his mother died of grief, and soon afterward his embittered father, who made repeated unsuccessful petitions on his son's behalf, gave up and died of a broken heart too.

As for Rachoff, he suffered a living death. Held in solitary confinement, he was denied all companionship except that of the vermin who shared his damp cell. All creaturely comforts were denied him, too, save for a musty leaf pile that served as his bed. A small barred window, set high in the wall and impossible to open, let in a small pool of filtered light by day, but otherwise there was none. It was achingly cold. There was food, but it came only at uncertain intervals, and consisted of unappetizing scraps.

Soon fever wracked Rachoff's wasted body. He lay and dreamed a great deal. Often he was delirious, and the visions that tortured him made sleep a descent into hell. "Turn back, you deluded fools!" He would cry in great distress, as if seeing the world's tormented about to fall over a cliff. "You are headed for the Pit. Stop, before it is too late. Stop! Stop!" And then, with muffled screams, "It is arrogance! murder!

lust! deceit! Turn away, and follow Jesus! Let Jesus come to you!”

Eventually the warden, a troubled old man made uneasy by Rachoff’s words, arranged for him to be transferred to a small stone shed in the monastery garden. The move came almost too late. Rachoff’s limbs, once strapping, were now wasted and white, and though he had once brimmed with confidence, his spirit now seemed utterly crushed.

Sunlight, fresh air, and regular food worked wonders, however, and soon Rachoff turned a corner. His emaciated body grew slowly stronger, his dreams became less oppressive, and a new radiance—an ethereal, innocent expression of joy—transfigured his face and did not fade. His mind was now like that of a little child, incapable of anything but simple speech. He was mad, one might say, mentally deranged. Yet who is to say how such matters are viewed in the world beyond?

Rachoff spent the last days of his life sitting in a corner of a small enclosed garden, his eyes closed, a smile playing on his face, his hands folded, his stooped shoulders warmed by the sun. On occasion he circled or swayed with slow steps. “I am dancing,” he explained, “for I shall soon see God.” He said this almost incredulously, as if not quite able to apprehend such happiness.

Then one day at twilight, in the middle of such a dance, he was seen to stop suddenly and kneel down. Opening his eyes wide, he cried loudly, “Jesus!” Then he slumped forward, his head sinking gently into the thick, deep grass. He saw God.

But that is not all. For though every man’s life must come to its end, God’s spirit can never be quenched. And even as Rachoff was readied for burial, others were setting out across the land, leaving their plows and nets to follow Him who said, “I am the Way.” Thus Jesus wanders on, over steppes and through forests, into hearts and homes. He looks into the eyes of beggars; he blesses children. No spies can prevent him, no magistrates can arrest him, no prison can hold him fast. He can cross

every frontier, and walk among us, too. Pray that he may, for we have long had need of him.

Jesus wanders on. So ends the story of every Rachoff.

SERPENTINO THE SNAKE MAN

Phillip Krämer

All but forgotten by the world, the little, old-fashioned town hides behind thick walls and under somber, red-roofed towers. But today something unusual is happening. The children flock together, screaming with excitement. Curious faces appear in the windows and storekeepers open their doors. The massive wooden Roder Gate has creaked open, gaping in amazement at the strange procession that is passing through it.

We see a small, light wagon—a very normal, uninteresting wagon actually—being drawn by a donkey. On the wagon rests a large cube, the four sides of which are plastered with gaudy posters. As if that weren't eye-catching enough, a lively, coffee-brown monkey scuttles nervously around the cube, dragging a heavy chain and seemingly unaware of the excitement he is causing in the crowd.

Behind the wagon, riding on another donkey, comes a man of indeterminate age. He is continually pulling up his legs, which are so long that they almost touch the ground. His neck is adorned with an enormous collar that was once white. He sits placidly on his mount, looks around with intentional foolishness, and tucks his legs up again. That is all. But the spectators cannot contain themselves—they split their sides laughing.

This marvelous procession stops at street corners to give the crowd a better look. Children crowd around screaming and yelling, gaping at

the placards. The grownups remain in their doorways, awkwardly trying to conceal their curiosity. In reality they are enjoying the man who sits on his donkey and does nothing just as much as the children.

The posters are unbelievable. One shows a slim performer in flesh-tone tights sitting at a table laden with a steaming lunch. He and the table are balanced on a skinny telephone wire high above the ground. The performer sits nonchalantly in a chair, smoking a cigar. On another poster, a lady dressed in Japanese costume and wearing a menacing look waves a black wand above a boy similarly dressed. He sits cross-legged on a table draped in black and decorated with skulls, and on a plate in front of him he holds his own head.

A third poster advertises three sailors flying through the air, turning head over heel between their wildly swinging trapezes. They are blindfolded. Of course there are also pictures of three bloodthirsty lions who, though raging and roaring, cower beneath the whip and the piercing eyes of their fearless trainer, a certain “Signor Ferrini in the Shining Top Boots”. In the next picture, they are shown jumping obediently through a burning hoop held by an attendant in a gold-braided uniform. It must be said, of course, that Signor Ferrini will not actually be performing at all—the lions have long since left the circus—but no matter.

Finally there is the massive portrait of a man with strikingly energetic features, fiery eyes, and an ever-so-smartly twirled mustache: the director of the circus. We are informed in bold letters that on Sunday, August 16, the day after tomorrow, in Klinger Square at four o’clock in the afternoon, the circus will begin its weeklong performance series with a grandiose, unparalleled, deluxe gala opening event at reduced prices.

A snake man, too, will be performing. His stage name is shouted in big green letters by a special sign at the rear of the procession. But what is Serpentino? Who is Serpentino? Where is Serpentino?

Far removed as it is from the bustling stream of modern life, this quiet little town had been given more to a contemplative existence filled with daydreams of the past than to the active, boisterous turmoil of the present. So it is not surprising that the circus immediately becomes the only topic of conversation.

The staid townspeople are proud and self-assured like the luxurious, high-gabled houses they inherited from their forefathers. But they had felt ever so bored in them. Their horizons were hemmed like their narrow streets. But suddenly they feel different. They look forward eagerly to the coming events. In *The Eagle*, where they go to play nine-pins, in the *Golden Peacock*, where they play cards, they talk animatedly of famous tight-rope walkers who, it is said, have walked across Niagara Falls. They tell each other in hushed voices of animal trainers who would have been torn to bloody shreds before the eyes of their horrified audiences, had they not at the last moment subdued their wild tigers with pistol shots. The oldest of them still clearly remember the day—it was a Monday in September 1844, just at the time when the mayor was so sick—when that daredevil of a tightrope walker plunged from the high wire down onto the pavement of the market square! His grave can still be seen in the churchyard—someone really ought to tidy it up a bit.

In the schoolyard of the King Ludwig Grammar School, the students are making plans involving Klinger Square. The pupils of the elementary school can't be found in their classrooms; they are already at Klinger Square, where a select and bitterly envied few are even allowed to lend a hand setting up the imposing structure which will support the trapezes.

The tobacconist's window holds photos mounted on a velvet-colored board that show members of the circus in their magnificent costumes, some of them performing their breathtaking, gut-wrenching stunts. And beneath the picture of a slim, handsome young man in an

elegant, light-colored suit we see again those questions: Who is Serpentino? What is Serpentino? Where is Serpentino?

LUDWIG KUHNERT, A SENIOR at the grammar school who hopes to graduate next Easter, has obtained twenty Pfennigs from his father, a shopkeeper, which will allow him to attend the opening performance in Klinger Square this afternoon. In order to get a good seat, he arrives a full hour early together with his friend Willi Brauss, a junior. Many had come even earlier, but Ludwig and Willi are not complaining—they find themselves at the front of the standing area with nothing between them and the ring but the rope barrier. They can easily see the two poles on the platform between which a thin wire has been stretched.

There is no need to feel bored. The curious townspeople are crowding in ever-growing numbers into this exciting new world, their jostling accompanied by the festive strains of a mighty organ, a huge bass drum, and a pair of cymbals beaten by a white-powdered clown. Ludwig's imagination conjures up strange and magnificent pictures full of color and movement. In three minutes it will strike four from the spire of St. James Church.

A trumpet signals the beginning of the show. The town tramp, hired as an attendant by the circus, appears on the platform. He is easy to recognize in spite of his borrowed uniform. He leans a dainty blue ladder against the thin wire, stretches the wire taut with a crank, and wipes it dry with a handkerchief that he then hangs over the middle of the wire.

Tra-ra-ra! The organ thunders, the big drum booms, and the snare drum rolls—the show is beginning. A girl—a child, really, touching to look at in her sky-blue costume with long silk stockings—flutters butterfly-like onto the platform and smiles down into the astonished, gaping mass of faces below. Her head, with light blue ribbons braided into her fair hair, turns gracefully this way and that.

The troupe are masters of their trade. They know how to craft the first number into an experience both gut-wrenching and touching. They achieve this through the innocence of the lovely child who flits up the dainty ladder with enchanting grace. Having reached the top, she leans nonchalantly against the support pole and unfolds the magnificent Japanese parasol that the town tramp hands her.

Acknowledging the now-silent audience again, she goes to work. Her first step so sure, so matter-of-course and exact, that there is no occasion for fear and anxiety. Having completed some simpler steps, the girl tries ever more complicated exercises, finally vaulting daintily over the seat of a white-painted chair that the town tramp holds tenderly in his grubby fingers.

And now comes her last number, a surprise so well calculated, so sophisticated, and so sudden in its effect that the crowd breaks into thrilled applause. Having proceeded to the center of the wire, she remains standing motionless as though turned to stone. Slowly the tramp turns a crank, and elastic life enters into the wire that was hitherto so light and taut. It bends under the weight of the motionless body until it finally forms a sharp angle, in the tip of which the child stands perfectly poised and balanced. The organ and drums fall silent: a miracle is about to occur. Life enters the child's body. Keeping her torso perfectly still, she begins to move the slack wire back and forth with her legs. The movement accelerates rapidly, and now the wire is rushing madly to and fro beneath the performer's feet. The oscillations keep increasing, but her upper body remains perfectly at rest. And now the movement is so violent that she cannot conceivably go on without falling. The big drum crashes, the audience jumps as though the worst had indeed taken place, and—motionless as before, smiling sweetly—the lovely child is standing poised in the center of the wire.

But before the audience has time to realize that their mediocre intelligence has been bluffed, the organ is thundering again and the child

leaps gracefully to earth, smiling at the stupefied crowd. She acknowledges their applause and disappears from the platform, only to reappear for a renewed expression of thanks. Then slipping into a cloak held by the tramp, she withdraws into the performers' tent behind the platform.

The performers all work so skillfully and with such a reassuring accuracy that it is a joy to watch them. Following a time-tested pattern of escalation, they have adroitly built the individual acts into an integrated program. While the tightrope scaffolding is taken down and a large carpet is unrolled, the clown entertains the crowd by his incredibly foolish zeal to share in the work. We recognize him as that same clean-shaven individual who was seen yesterday riding the donkey in his enormous, no-longer-white collar, the one who, though he did nothing in particular, brought the good people of the town to paroxysms of laughter. And now he is given a resounding box on the ears for no good reason by the tramp. He expresses his dismay by making the tremendous hair of his lobster-red wig stand up on end, no doubt using some clever mechanism in his trouser pockets. The audience screams with appreciation, and the clown deftly makes way for the enormous athlete who begins to play with fifty-pound weights as if they were children's balls. He lets them drop on the broad nape of his neck with a resounding crunch that can be heard throughout the tent. Hurrah!

How time is flying! Nobody notices the lengthening shadows. Sixteen acts were promised, and we are on the fourteenth—the flying sailors who work on swinging trapezes with breathtaking boldness. They seem to out-do all the performances up to now.

Having finished, they bow to the audience while a table is placed on the stage. A heavy, dark-green velvet cloth strewn with glittering gold stars decorates it. Embroidered on the edge of the cloth is an iridescent serpent that winds itself artistically around the table and bites its own tail.

There is no doubt that it is now Serpentino's turn. He comes onto the platform slowly, wrapped in a cloak. He adjusts the table, rubs the cloth thoughtfully, and rubs his hands and feet in white powder. His feet are encased in tight-fitting shoes of light-green silk. His actions are measured and deliberate, and the crowd's anticipation is near the boiling point. Suddenly, just when no-one was expecting it, the enveloping mantle falls to the ground and Serpentino the Snake Man stands majestically on the stage, ready to begin.

He is dressed from head to toe in shimmering green silk. Darker stripes on his chest, back, and limbs suggest the body of a snake. This impression is emphasized by the extraordinary slimness of his boyish body. He can't be more than sixteen years old. He steps in front of the table and raises his arms slowly like a swimmer preparing to dive. Gently he bends over backwards until his palms touch the table. He pauses, and then his feet leave the ground. With inimitable grace, his body flips upward and comes to rest in a simple handstand on the tabletop. He regains his feet with ease. If this is how he gets into position, what will his performance be like?

This inconsequential introductory trick apparently serves only to remind the performer's body that for the next quarter of an hour it must submit to his will. But it also shows quite clearly the uniqueness of the young artist whose older colleagues grudgingly concede the certainty of a brilliant future in the leading European circuses. It shows the fabulous flexibility of his well-proportioned limbs, the determined discipline of his will, the calm of a man sure of his goal. He begins his work.

His work is to show the gaping crowd that much can be accomplished while one is still very young. It is to demonstrate that he commands every muscle in his body like a general commands an army. His body obeys his every whim while making his motions seem effortless, betraying no trace of the enormous effort of practice, perseverance, and pain. No-one has an inkling of his disappointments, his self-denial.

Still standing on the table, Serpentino places a handkerchief behind him quite close to his feet. With his hands held tight against his sides, he bends over backwards and picks up the cloth carefully in his mouth. Then, spreading his legs, he bends backwards again until his face appears between his knees, smiling benignly at the audience. The applause is deafening. Now he lies prone on the table and touches his head with the tips of his toes. Then, bending his head backwards, he rests it on the soles of his feet. His hands remain motionless at his sides throughout.

The town tramp hands Serpentino a stick about a yard long with a plate-sized disk attached to the top end. Inserting the other end in a hole in the tabletop, he steps onto the platform and completes his program in this precarious position. He repeats his first acts as if limbering up for the climax of his performance. There are murmurs in the crowd: "The boy has no bones at all!" "He must be made of rubber." The more superstitious audience members discuss the absurd idea that the performer is not a human at all, but rather a phantom that is poking fun at them. A small covey of garrulous old maids inform all who will listen that the whole thing is a hoax.

Such commentary, having begun quietly, is voiced most strongly as Serpentino plays his trump card. The town tramp places the lower half of a twelve-inch sphere on the tiny platform. It rocks gently as Serpentino steps into it and begins to roll himself up like a carpet. Soon he has compressed himself so tightly that the top half can be pressed over him. He remains encased in this minute chrysalis. Four strong hands seize the sphere and raise it on high, displaying this miracle of acrobatic achievement to more than a thousand astonished eyes. There is no applause: the audience is dumbfounded. Then, quick as monkeys, they carry Serpentino the Snake Man away.

The organ blasts suddenly, and the crowd begins to applaud frantically. Serpentino reappears, intoxicated by the love of the masses.

The last performance is over and the clocks show half past six as the crowd, swarming like an anthill, gets up. They had been held spell-bound for two and a half hours by the miracle-workers on stage, and now they laugh and cry out as if released from an enchantment. Swarming and pushing, they are drawn as if by a magnet to the platform where these marvels took place. They mill around the performers' tent, which remains strictly closed to all curious eyes. Then they stream sluggishly away to their homes.

More than ever, the tightrope artists have become the talk of the town. It is as if a fresh gust of wind had revitalized the souls of the good citizens. Their humdrum existence has been enriched, and they feel lifted above it.

LUDWIG KUHNERT WALKS away from the tent with mixed emotions. How unspeakably happy it would have made him to be able to see this strangely supple Snake Man eye to eye, to speak to him in person, boy to boy. But this could not happen when Serpentino was encased in his snakeskin, wrapped in the gaze of the adoring multitudes. Ludwig wants to meet him in ordinary clothes and speak to him with ordinary words.

Ludwig can't say why he feels this strange desire. It is simply there—it had begun the moment the Snake Man had started his act. He is absent-minded in his replies to Willi Brauss as they walk homeward. The strains of the organ are still in his ears, and Serpentino stands before his eyes. Ludwig feels the urgent need to be alone. At home, he locks himself in his room and sits down by the open window. Dusk is falling, and pigeons are cooing on the roof. There is singing and laughter from around the corner. Suddenly, Ludwig has a distinct vision. He sees Serpentino standing before him. He is beautiful. He stands with one hand on his hip and the other raised slightly and gracefully, beckoning to Ludwig.

“Dinner time, Ludwig!” He answers, still in another world, and goes to the dining room.

After dinner, Ludwig’s father Heinrich Kuhnert reads an evening devotion. This tradition has been strictly observed in the Kuhnert family for generations. It has had a great effect on Ludwig, and has given him a firm determination to follow the path of good. Once, after a reading about mission, the boy had been so moved in his heart that he stood up and declared with trembling lips his intention to go to the heathen the very next day. Another time, the text had struck his conscience, and he had quietly and shame-facedly left the room.

But today Ludwig is absent-minded during the reading. Noticing this, his father remarks that going to the circus had done him no good. “You are still there in your thoughts,” he says.

As Ludwig prepares for bed, the figure of the Snake Man stands suddenly before him again. There he is on the soft green velvet—slim and supple, self-controlled, the very image of will, discipline, and arid tenacity. But don’t his eyes hint at a secret fire, an aching longing? Isn’t something concealed behind his smile? What is it? Something is definitely there.

Ludwig feels a sudden urge to speak to Serpentino. He reaches out for him, and is abruptly aware that he is alone. He tries to recapture the vanished vision, but in vain. Tomorrow he will try to meet Serpentino. He will speak with him. And why not? The mere thought of speaking to this strange person is exciting.

No. Suddenly Ludwig sees quite clearly that what drives him is nothing but vanity and the desire for an exciting new experience. It would be better for him to stay at home. Yet again, something he has never known before draws him to Serpentino. He cannot resist. But what should he talk about with him? When? Where? Ludwig fell into an uneasy sleep.

The morning devotion is taken from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians: "To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win Jews," his father reads. "I put myself under the law of Moses to win them. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. Indeed, I have become everything in turn to men of every sort, so that in one way or another I may save some." Ludwig feels in Paul a man who trembled for the salvation of others, a man who found a purpose and blessing for his life in saving others' souls.

But, "Oh, you ridiculous boy," Ludwig thinks. "What you have in mind is really absurd. You know that it is foolish and hopeless. It's such a silly idea—even you have to laugh at yourself.

"No. I'll do it."

Having fought through his own objections, Ludwig turns to his father. "I think you were wrong last night, Papa, when you said it would have been better for me not to have seen the tightrope artists."

"How do you mean?"

"I believe I have a mission to a young man from the troupe. He is about as old as I am. I mean the Snake Man..."

It would probably be best to give Serpentino a New Testament. Would he ever have heard of it? Serpentino would stay in town for just one week, so words would not be much help. This little book, though, could go with him wherever he went. Would it be better to mail it to him? But no, that would be cowardly.

Ludwig knew that he would have to engage Serpentino in conversation. Then a moment will come when he can ask him if he knows about Jesus of Nazareth. Ludwig prays for an opportunity to speak to Serpentino.

THE DOOR OF THE GLOSSY green caravan opens again. Ludwig has been waiting for hours with the strained patience of a hunter, and now his

patience is rewarded. His breathing becomes fast, his stomach knots. Now Ludwig can approach him, Serpentino the Snake Man. He can courteously apologize for daring to ask him to read this little book. But... Serpentino is already walking away, with Ludwig looking after him. He had not gone to him, yet he can't take his eyes off him. He follows. Serpentino just walks along. He can't be recognized for what he really is—his clothes are quite ordinary, and his shorts make him look even more boyish. True, his gait is sure and elastic and there is a peculiar subtle grace to the way he twirls his cane. But it is not enough to be striking.

Instead of the road to the center of town, Serpentino heads for the gates. He is obviously planning a stroll in the countryside. Ludwig finds himself imitating his gait. He loses sight of him at the Millers Gate.

Feeling a sudden urge to turn back, Ludwig hesitates, but then takes up pursuit at careful distance. The gravel path runs parallel to the street. Serpentino stops and removes his straw hat.

Ludwig starts, caught red-handed. Serpentino wipes his forehead with his handkerchief.

The view from this spot lives up to its reputation. Not for nothing do strangers come to this place and gaze long and lovingly at the glistening jewel which is the town they have walked from. Serpentino turns, shading his eyes with his hand. Ludwig looks at the ground and keeps walking. He is coming closer and closer. Now he is walking past him. Suddenly he hears himself addressed: "Excuse me, can you tell me—is it here that one gets the fine view of the town?" A clear, boyish voice, just on the verge of breaking. "That's not it," Ludwig declares, not daring to look up. And pointing: "It's just up there. I'm going that way myself."

Serpentino understands.

"That is very obliging, really very obliging. May I join you?" He speaks as one who knows the ways of the world.

“Yes.”

They follow a side road from which they can see the town. The way leads slightly upwards and they walk side by side without speaking. Ludwig feels shy but extremely happy. Serpentino is quiet.

There are benches under the boughs of some linden trees. A little spring of water gurgles into a red sandstone trough. Strangely, nobody else is here. From this vantage point you can see the town spread out in the afternoon sun, lovely and sparkling. Serpentino has no words for the beauty before him.

Ludwig says, “That is nice.”

The snake man nods.

Ludwig is filled with joy to be sitting next to Serpentino. This is a golden opportunity. But how should he start the conversation?

Both sink into themselves, gazing at the storybook picture of the quiet town. Far beyond they can see a tender veil of creeping mist over the glittering ribbon of a little stream. Serpentino’s soul is quietly transformed as he gazes at this wonderful scene. It soars higher and higher into the golden air. Half in dream, he forgets himself and exclaims, “Oh, how I wish I could live in this town.”

Ludwig startles him by saying, “Why is that?”

“Because it is so beautiful here.”

“Yes, visitors from all over the world say the same thing. But where do you live?”

“Oh, that is hard to say. I am a restless, migratory bird. Ah, forgive me, but it is true. I belong to the artists who have just come to be guests in this city. I have an engagement here. My name is Miegner, Willi Miegner. Among the artists I am known as Serpentino.”

Having said this, Serpentino has regained his composure. This surprises Ludwig so much that he forgets to introduce himself—it does not even occur to him. But he does not let on that he knows Serpentino already.

"Then I must have seen you on Sunday afternoon. Are you Serpentino the snake man?"

"I am. Did you come to our performance? Did you enjoy it?"

"It was fine. The whole town is talking about it. But how do you do it all?"

"Oh, it's not so difficult."

"You must have to practice a terribly long time. But I imagine it is fun too. I actually have a secret wish to be an artist like you. How did you become one?"

Serpentino is silent, like a man about to confide a secret.

"It's a long story. Are you really interested?"

"Oh, I want to know. You must be terribly happy to have come so far and perform so well."

Serpentino corrects him: "Perform? We call it work. Whoever wants to know what work is should come to us. Do you know what it means to work? Our profession is danger. But happiness? That's something else. None of us know happiness. I don't. Maybe a few minutes now and then. But then, you know—then it is bliss."

"It must not be too hard, if you are confident."

"That's what they all say. Come tomorrow and visit us a bit. Then you'll feel differently, I can assure you."

"I can come to see you?" Ludwig cannot believe his good fortune, and has to ask again, "May I really come and see you?"

"Yes, of course. You know, we're glad to have a closer contact with the audience. Mostly they just envy us. There is a gulf between us. They admire us, but they don't love us. But just come once, just come, and you'll see."

Serpentino speaks like a man who has been carrying a burden on his heart for many long months. The door is open.

"When shall I come?"

“Whenever you want to and have time. Just ask for me, and anyone in the troupe will let you in.”

“Thank you.”

What is it that draws the souls of these two shy young boys together? Is it that Serpentino longs for love rather than admiration? Is it that Ludwig secretly wishes to penetrate this lonely soul? Or is it simply the bright, glowing fairy tale look of this ancient town lit by a summer sky that takes hold of both their souls?

They approach each other like two souls who felt the urge to exchange treasured secrets and sorrows.

Each searches for a freeing word for the other, but neither finds it.

They start back towards the town and separate at Klinger Square. Handing Serpentino a package wrapped in red tissue paper, Ludwig says, “Please read from this little book. It’s a present.”

“Do you really want to give this to me? Thank you!”

“Well, goodbye.”

“Goodbye. I’ll see you at the evening performance.”

Serpentino climbs up the wooden stairs and disappears into the little green caravan wagon. Ludwig is soon home in the high-gabled house of his father.

SERPENTINO, the snake man, works.

Klinger Square is lit by evening light and the flicker of many gas lamps. The people in the audience throng behind the ropes separating them from the stage. The lighting distorts their faces, giving them gruesome expressions. But the stage is well lit by the gas-jets. The organ is sounding a melody. The muted hollow-sounding drum accompanies it.

SERPENTINO, the snake man, works.

He is flooded by light, like a vision magically appearing to the throngs of people amazedly watching the stage. His flexible body vibrates and glistens with every movement. Do you know what it means to work? How would you interpret the friendly boyish smile around his mouth?

See how he bends and flexes and bows, how he moves around. Don't you see this miracle, you with your dark faces, your gaping masks, you staring pack of people. You cannot touch him.

Hello, up there! You young man surrounded by light! Don't be afraid of the people down there in the darkness. Come on, get to work! You will succeed, you must succeed. Show them how! Smile, smile, you are adored. The organ is singing. The drums beat out a mute and mysterious sorrow.

Serpentino, the snake man, is working.

A snap of your fingers, and then head down, very deep. Will you see them again? Why do you close your eyes in fright? It's good you do that, because they don't love you. They don't know the price you have to pay... They don't know, as you do, the constant pain in the limbs, like an old friend. Oh, they do not feel it! What is the dizzying emptiness around you? You are as familiar with it as the air you breathe. Take no notice of it.

You bend and you flex your agile body. There now, you have succeeded, you had to succeed. You are not afraid anymore...

Do you see the sphere that has been put next to you?

You must get into it: it is the best act, the last act. Slowly, very slowly. Ignore the pain.

Now you must smile at them.

The organ is quiet. Do you hear the silence?

Now...now...

And the applause of the audience awakens him.

He thanks them, bathed in sweat. He runs quickly to the performers' tent. Ludwig is waiting for him. He hardly sees him. Quickly he slips into his overcoat. "Now you will see," he says. With quick steps he reaches the mattress set aside for him and falls onto it, digging both his hands into it. An old man covers him with a thick blanket, and then goes away. Only Serpentino's head is visible. Ludwig sits beside him on the mattress and stares at the lifeless, powdered face, a face he cannot recognize as Willi's. The nostrils quiver violently.

This is how it is... This is also how it is...

Outside you can hear the music of the organ playing a rousing march. The drums thunder. Throngs of people are laughing at the antics of the clown... This is also how it is...

Serpentino has done his work.

Slowly life seeps back into his body, which gently stirs beneath the blanket. Serpentino lifts his head and looks at Ludwig: "It's all over. Would you take the blanket off me, Ludwig? Thanks so much."

There lies the green snake, vibrating. Serpentino gets up and throws off his overcoat. "I must practice now." He bends and stretches arms and legs for a few minutes. He breathes slowly and deeply, in one nostril and out the other. Then he puts on his overcoat.

"Forgive me. Now I must get to sleep as quickly as possible. Thank you for coming. I just wanted you to see all this. You understand why I leave you so quickly. But you'll come again tomorrow, won't you? Thank you, good night!" Willi quickly disappears out of the tent.

Ludwig has not said a word all this time. Shocked and perplexed, he steps out into the plaza. High up on the tightrope, stretched between heaven and earth, is a beautiful girl who keeps her balance with ease. In the entrance to the performers' tent, Ludwig can see the clown, his gaze fixed anxiously on the girl on the tightrope. She is his only daughter.

Ludwig can't stand it a moment longer. The organ sounds triumphantly. It is as if the joyful music were going to devour him. Passing Serpentino's caravan, he sees the lamp within being snuffed out. Ludwig begins to run, run away, anywhere...home.

IT IS THURSDAY AFTERNOON, five o'clock. Already. The circus performers will leave on Sunday evening. On Monday they will be in some other town and children will run to them screaming with excitement. It will start with a gala parade, and at the opening performance little prizes will be given out.

Ludwig and his unusual friend are on a stroll outside the town. Soon they'll come to the little knoll where they had their first encounter.

They feel as though they have known each other for a long time. They do not think of Monday when they will have to part from one another again.

Serpentino has already read the New Testament. It wasn't completely new to him. Here and there he had heard stories of Jesus. He had been to different churches. In Petersburg, he had heard a former circus performer preaching at a gathering of performers. This man had a great effect on his listeners, but others called him crazy, a religious fanatic. He also remembers a Christmas in Geneva. They were invited to a Christmas dinner by some kindly, pious folk who showed them beautiful colored slides illustrating the life of the Savior. But Serpentino does not ask Ludwig why he had given him the New Testament.

They look across the landscape towards the city bathed in the late afternoon sunlight. If Serpentino were as skilled at speaking as he was with his limbs, he would speak now. The deepest feelings of his soul, until now vague and undefined, well up in his breast. He feels the trusting and compassionate hand of his friend on his own hand.

He knew it isn't only because Ludwig admires his acrobatics, but... well, why? If Serpentino could just begin to talk, forget his surround-

ings, and pour out the story of his harsh, painful life, then Ludwig would see before him a homeless wanderer. The story would tug at his heartstrings, the story of a soul who knows men only as strangers. The story of one who knows landscapes, but no homeland; who knows the seas, but no harbor safe from harm. But Serpentino can not free himself of the burden of the painful experiences of his childhood or share his inner turmoil.

But at last it bursts from him. The golden light of the evening sun envelopes both of them. In the distance, the thin band of a silver stream disappears in a mist that seems to end in Eternity. The busy hum of the city can still be heard and the spring behind them bubbles. A finch is piping in the linden trees. It is as if an inner voice prompts him: "Do not close your heart." And Willi Miegner, Serpentino the Snake Man, tells his story.

"EH BIEN! MOTHER KLÖNEN, are you bringing us something again?" Willi Miegner stood in front of the old bowlegged, whitehaired man whose feet were shod in brown riding boots.

"Well, well, and how old is he?"

Father Kissel, the trainer of the Sidoli circus, was a former acrobatic horseback rider and juggler. He did not speak to Willi directly, but through Mother Klönen.

"What did you say? Did you say seven? Not bad! A sturdy young man, but a little tall for his age. Well, we will see. Tell him to undress."

Mother Klönen said, "Get undressed."

Willi started to undress.

Father Kissel said, "Tell him to be quick. Time is money, time is money!"

Mother Klönen said, "Hurry up."

Father Kissel tapped and fingered Willi's arms and legs and listened to his chest. He made him raise his arms. "Higher, higher, stiffen your fingers." Then he measured him.

"And now tell him to get dressed, fast!"

"Get dressed again," said Mother Klönen.

Willi did not know if he should cry. He was afraid. Father Kissel had not even asked his name. Mother Klönen said goodbye to him and left the caravan with Father Kissel. The caravan stood between the stables and the performance tent. It smelled of horses.

Willi did not dare to move. He saw different kinds of whips, decorated with wilted oak leaves, hanging from the walls. He did not understand what deal they were making outside the caravan, but he knew that it concerned him.

After a quarter of an hour, or it could even have been an hour, or two minutes, Father Kissel came to the door and said, "Eh bien! Come, we'll start right away with a few exercises."

Mother Klönen wasn't there anymore.

The performance tent was half lit. The sunlight came in only through small holes in the canvas by the two main supporting poles. It smelled of crowds and stable. The audience hall was empty. The ushers were wiping down the scattered and disorderly benches and chairs in the gallery. The seats in the front rows were roped off. In the passageway were three acrobats who, the evening before, had performed their Olympic stunts in tennis suits. Now they rolled out a carpet and were practicing in dirty overalls. A pony, unsaddled, wandered through the circus tent.

Father Kissel took a whip from the sandy floor and cracked it. The pony immediately stood still and coughed.

"So, young man, get on with it. You're going to have to get used to this place. This is your battlefield, do you understand? Jump on that

stupid pony over there. Don't be afraid. Someday you'll be a great artist, won't you? So, go ahead. You can get up by yourself. Get ready!"

He cracked his whip: "En avant!"

The pony lurched forward and Willi fell down.

"Oh, lalalala," laughed Father Kissel, who had known this would happen and was waiting for it. "Encore! Encore!"

Willi climbed onto the pony's back again. This time the pony trotted with an even pace around the training ground. Father Kissel talked continuously: "There, there, you see, whoa, whoa, that's right, head up, higher, so. Chest out—more—good. That's just right. Squeeze your knees in. So..."

"That's almost fun, isn't it? If only it hadn't taken you so long." Willi felt dizzy and tired.

Suddenly Father Kissel cracked his whip. The pony reared into the air, and Willi fell clumsily to the soft sand. "That's all for now," laughed Father Kissel. He had succeeded. "You're finished for the day."

The pony coughed loudly and trotted to the center of the training ring, rubbing his head on Father Kissel's hand, who petted it and gave it two lumps of sugar. The pony went alone to its stall. "You see? That was pretty good already. One day you'll be a great horseback rider and performer, like I am. We're going to work hard at it, understand?"

While Father Kissel was saying this, the other acrobats were practicing a new act. They were constantly shouting "Hupp! Hupp!" Willi would never forget the rhythmic chant.

The horseback riding did not work out. As the training got more rigorous, it became clear that Willi was not meant to be a horseback rider. For example, he was supposed to run around the ring three or four times beside the pony, and then jump onto his back. He grabbed the animal's mane to hold on, but it didn't work. The horse's back went

by too fast under him, and he fell in the sand. He practiced this for weeks but could never manage it. He would often run alongside the horse for half an hour, trying to jump on its back.

“Again! Again!” Father Kissel would shout in annoyance.

At the moment when the boy was supposed to jump onto the horse’s back, he would strike his whip at the boy’s feet to make him jump. “One...two...” Willi jumped. “Three!” Father Kissel struck again. Willi cried out in pain and fell.

This went on until he was completely exhausted and bathed in sweat, day after day. He would often lie there afterwards for half an hour, simply exhausted and unable to move.

“Get on with it, boy! You have to do it. Grit your teeth. It was the same with me.”

This torturous situation continued until the day when his real gifts were discovered. This happened on a July morning when the acrobats rolled out the carpets in the training ring to practice. Out of boredom, Willi stayed for a while to watch them. He enjoyed it and joined in their practice, liked it, and so continued practicing. Thereupon it became obvious that he should change his activity from horseback riding to acrobatics.

But Father Kissel, who had fifty years of experience, said, “You’ll see. It won’t work. But go on, go on. You’ll see it won’t end well. The boy is growing too fast and he’s too tall for his age. You’ll see.”

Nevertheless Willi stuck with it. He worked hard so that he could perform in the Icarician Games as a star performer, skillfully winding himself through the outstretched legs of the other acrobats who were lying on the ground and then, curling himself up tightly, he was tossed back and forth like a ball by the other acrobats. At his first public performance he was so successful, performing the whole act without any mishap, that the ambition to become an artist was awakened. He began

practicing for whole mornings under the supervision of other performers, and then started to develop his own act as the Snake Man.

His flexibility and sense of balance increased month by month. When he was twelve years old he performed his own act for the first time in public as Serpentino the Snake Man. He was shy and afraid, of course, but this was to be expected. The circus manager wisely placed the act at the beginning of the program, so that in case Willi made a mess of it, people would have forgotten what happened by the end. But he was successful and his gift was acknowledged.

When he was fourteen he performed at the Ice Palace in Berlin, at the Apollo in Nüremburg, and at the Schumann Circus in Frankfurt where the sophisticated audience was more demanding. But that did not stop him from giving a performance in Paris at the Folies Bergères at the age of fifteen. He was not the main performer, of course, but still he performed. And it didn't take much to see that he had a shining future in front of him.

Although he had recently noticed small pains in his sides during some performances, it was hardly worth mentioning. He could always find something to relieve the pain, especially massage. But the whole thing was not worth mentioning. But sometimes in a quiet moment Willi would remember the words of Father Kissel: "He is too tall. He grows too fast." Naturally the sharp pains had nothing to do with that.

THEN CAME THE TERRIBLE event that changed Willi's life in a moment. It changed him inwardly, turning him inside out. He aged suddenly. He changed so completely that even he did not recognize himself anymore. Willi was sure that at the age of fifteen he had a murder on his conscience. A murder!

Yes, murder. That was the right word, although the director and the stable master tried repeatedly to convince him that it was just an accident.

It happened like this:

An adventurous young boy of about seventeen years came into his dressing room one evening after the performance and demanded that Serpentino tell him how to become a circus acrobat. Serpentino laughed. The boy insisted. Serpentino said, just to get rid of him, "All right, come to the circus tomorrow afternoon at three o'clock. I'll be practicing then and I will meet you there. We'll see if you are fit for this profession."

The young man really did turn up.

"I want to tell you something," Willi began, after the boy had watched for half an hour. "The bridge, you know, that's the test. Whoever cannot do the bridge right away is too old, and he won't be able to learn any more. Go ahead, make the bridge."

"What is that?"

"I'll show you, just watch."

Starting from a standing position, Willi bent his upper body so far back that his hands touched the ground, and then returned slowly to a normal stance. To him, it was nothing more than child's play.

"You don't need to do it the same way I did. If you can manage to bend backwards to the floor, that will be enough. You can even collapse then; I will hold you. Here, put on this belt. But whatever happens you have to reach the floor. You're doing this on your own responsibility. If you don't want to do it, just say so. There's still time to stop. Good. Stand here in front of me. Feet together, hands up high. Slowly. Take a deep breath. Are you ready? Yes? Another deep breath, and now—down."

The young lad knew what was at stake. He bent over backwards with reckless abandon. He even gave himself an extra push—then suddenly screamed out loudly.

Willi let go of him, shocked, and the boy fell to the ground.

Willi heard a muffled crack.

The twisted, lifeless body was motionless. The boy's face turned yellow and green, its expression completely distorted. The veins in his neck were horribly swollen, and out of his mouth trickled a thin line of blood. Foam was on his lips.

Willi stared at the ghastly sight, oblivious of anything else.

The director and the stable master came running.

A dog barked.

Servants came. Someone called for the doctor.

They probed the body of the fallen boy.

At last the doctor came.

He asked quietly what had happened. Someone showed him the boy on the ground. For a few moments he touched the body with expert hands. Everyone stared silently. The doctor looked at his watch and said, "Three twenty-eight."

"What do you think?"

"Dead."

SERPENTINO HAD A MURDER on his conscience, although no one else saw it that way. The distorted, ugly grimace on the face of the dead boy haunted and tortured him, constantly crying out and accusing him; the fingers, clawing into the sand of the circus ring, threatened to grab him and tear him to shreds.

"You! You! You!"

Why couldn't he believe the stable master, who said, "It's too bad. He could have amounted to something. He sure had courage. But it was his own fault; he insisted."

His own fault?

If only he could believe that.

Each time he made the bridge, he saw the face of the dead boy before him. He saw him in the light of the torches, in the distorted faces of the audience. He heard his moaning in the sound of the organ.

There was no remedy for it.

Somehow, Serpentino connected the pain in his side with the shattering experience in his soul. Yes, he was even becoming a little superstitious. He was afraid to perform on Fridays.

There was no remedy.

It didn't even give him any peace to give his hard-earned money to charities. Worst of all, he was not able to share the consuming sorrow of his boyish heart with anyone. No one.

Until today.

LUDWIG GRIPS the hand of his friend, who is weeping quietly beside him. The air is shimmering, dark gold over the city. The finch pipes in the linden tree.

"Now I can say this," Ludwig begins. "Something I have had on my heart for a long time. Please, read the New Testament I gave you. There you will find what you need to have peace with your conscience."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. The New Testament says so."

"Explain it more clearly."

"I can't say it the way I want to. Forgive me. But I have experienced it, and I know it's the truth."

"Please, say whatever you like, Ludwig."

"God has loved the world so much that He sent His only begotten Son, so that all who believe in Him might not perish, but have eternal life."

“How can I believe in Him?”

“Pray to Him!”

“I don’t know how. I don’t know where this will lead me. But I sense something... Oh, Ludwig, I am so terribly sad.”

Willi holds his hand over his eyes so that Ludwig cannot see that he is still crying. It is quiet around them. He prays.

The finch pipes and sings.

It is Monday midday, and Klinger Square is busy as usual.

ONLY THE TWO GREEN CARAVANS are left. Tonight they will leave with all the performers. They will drive all night until they reach the next town. Tomorrow people will look again at the advertisements in the shop windows and marvel at the pictures of the Snake Man.

Now it is already evening.

The horses are harnessed to the wagons, stamping their feet. The drivers are happily cracking their whips. The little bells jingle on the necks of the animals.

“Get along. Let’s go!”

Let’s go into the future. Life is a journey into the endless distance.

Ring, you bells, you merry bells. Life plays on the souls of the lost like the wind on the bells.

Get along! Let’s go!

Why do they look at us like that, as if we are Happiness himself? We’ve made a lot of money here. Yes, sir! And the children are running after us, calling. And the sun will soon go down. And then it will be dark.

Get along! Let’s go!

ARM IN ARM THEY stroll alongside the wagon.

This is the Müllern gate. Over there in the far twilight is our favorite place where we first met. Willi has to jump into the wagon.

“Farewell, my friend, farewell.”

“Goodbye!”

Get along, let’s go! The bells ring.

Willi stands at the back window of the caravan. He holds his New Testament in his hands.

Ludwig waves to him until the wagon is swallowed up in darkness. But there again he sees a flicker of light as a lamp is lighted in the wagon. And quietly, quietly, the sound of the ringing bells still reaches him like a farewell greeting, ding-a-ling, ding-a-ling, dong, dong...

Ludwig stands alone in the street.

“O Willi, my friend for much too short a time...”

IN THE NEXT TOWN they will be asking: Who is Serpentino? What is Serpentino? Where is Serpentino?

AN ONION

Fyodor Dostoyevsky

Once upon a time there was a woman, and she was as wicked as wicked could be, and she died. And not one good deed was left behind her. The devils took her and threw her into the lake of fire.

Her guardian angel stood thinking: What good deed of hers can I tell to God? Then he remembered and said to God: once she pulled up an onion and gave it to a beggar woman. And God answered: now take that same onion, hold it to her in the lake, let her take hold of it, and pull, and if you pull her out of the lake, she can go to Paradise, but if the onion breaks, she can stay where she is.

The angel ran to the woman and held out the onion to her: here, woman, he said, take hold of it and I'll pull. And he began pulling carefully, and had almost pulled her all the way out, when other sinners in the lake saw her being pulled out and all began holding on to her so as to be pulled out with her. But the woman was wicked as wicked could be, and she began to kick them with her feet: It's me who's getting pulled out, not you; it's my onion, not yours.

No sooner did she say that than the onion broke. And the woman fell back into the lake and is burning there to this day. And the angel wept and went away.

FATHER ZOSSIMA'S BROTHER

Fyodor Dostoyevsky

I was born in a remote northern province, in the town of V. My father was a gentleman by birth, but of no great consequence or position. He died when I was only two years old, and I don't remember him at all. He left my mother a small house built of wood, and a fortune—not large, but sufficient to keep her and her children in comfort. There were two of us, my elder brother Markel and I. He was about eight years older than I, hot-tempered and irritable by nature, but kind, not given to mockery, and strangely silent, especially at home with me, mother, and the servants. He was a good student, but did not make friends with his schoolmates, although he did not quarrel with them either, at least not that my mother remembered. Six months before his death, when he was seventeen, he took to visiting a certain solitary man, a political exile banished from Moscow to our town for free-thinking. This exile was a great scholar and distinguished philosopher at the university. For some reason he came to love Markel and welcomed his visits. The young man spent whole evenings with him, and did so through the whole winter, until the exile was called back to government service in Petersburg.

It was before the beginning of the fasting time, and Markel would not fast. He was rude and laughed at it. "That is silly," he said. "There is no God." My mother and the servants were absolutely horrified. Though I was only nine years old, I was terribly shocked.

But in the sixth week of this fasting time, my brother, who was never very strong, was taken ill. He was tall, but thin and delicate looking. He caught cold, and the doctor who came whispered to my mother that he would not live through the spring. My mother began weeping and asked my brother cautiously to go to church and to confess all his sins so as to make peace with God. This made him very angry, and he said terrible things. But he grew thoughtful; he guessed at once that he was very seriously ill and that this was why my mother was begging him to make peace with God. He had been aware, indeed, for a long time past, that he was far from well, and a year before he had in a cool way said to my mother and me at dinner, "My life won't be long, I may not live another year," which seemed now like a prophecy.

Three days passed, and the Holy Week came. And on Tuesday my brother began to make peace with God. "I am doing this simply for your sake, mother, to please and comfort you," he said. My mother wept with joy and sadness. "His end must be very near," she thought, "if there is such a change in him." But he was not able to go to church long. He took so ill that he had to be in bed.

It was a late Easter, and the days were bright, fine, and full. I remember he used to cough all night and sleep badly, but in the morning he dressed and tried to sit up in an armchair. That's how I remember him sitting, sweet and gently smiling, his face bright and joyous, in spite of his illness. He was utterly changed in spirit—such a wondrous change had suddenly begun in him. The old nurse would come in and say, "Let us light the lamp in front of your icon, my dear." Before, he would not have allowed it, but now he said, "Light it, dear nurse, light it. I was an evil boy to prevent you doing so before. You pray when you light the candle, and I pray and rejoice when I see you. So we are praying to the same God and are praying together."

Those words seemed strange to us, and my mother would go out to her room and weep. But when she went to him she wiped her eyes and

looked cheerful. "Mother, don't weep," he would say. "I have long to live yet, long to rejoice with you, and life, life is gladsome, joyful."

"Ah, my dear, what sort of gladness is there for you, if you burn in fever all night and cough as if your lungs were about to burst?"

"Mama," he would answer, "do not weep, life is Paradise, and we are all in Paradise, but we do not want to know it. If we did want to know it, tomorrow there would be Paradise the world over."

And everyone marveled at his words, he spoke so strangely and so decisively; everyone was moved and wept.

Acquaintances came to visit us: "My beloved," he would say, "how have I deserved your love, why do you love such a one as I, and how is it that I did not know it then, that I did not appreciate it before?"

When the servants came to him he would say continually to them, "Dear, kind people, why do you serve me? Am I worthy of being served? If God were to have mercy on me and let me live, I would begin serving you, for we must all serve each other."

Mother shook her head and said, "My darling, it's your illness that makes you talk like that."

"Mama darling," he would say, "it is not possible for there to be no masters and servants, but let me also be the servant of my servants, the same as they are now to me. And I shall also tell you, dear mother, that each of us is guilty in everything before all men, and I more than any."

Mother positively smiled at that, smiled through her tears. "How can it be that you are the most guilty before everyone? There are murderers and robbers, and how have you managed to sin so that you should accuse yourself most of all?"

"Dear mother, heart of my heart," he said (he had begun saying such unexpected, endearing words), "little heart of mine, my joyful one, believe me, each of us is guilty before everyone, for everyone and everything. I don't know how to explain it to you, but I feel it so pain-

fully in me. And how could we have lived before, getting angry, and not knowing anything?"

Thus he awoke every day with more and more tenderness, rejoicing and full of love. When the doctor, an old German called Eisenschmidt, came, he would ask jokingly, "Well, what do you think, doctor, shall I live one more day in this world?"

"You will have many days yet," the doctor answered, "And months and years too."

"But what are years, what are months!" my brother would exclaim. "Why reckon the days, when one day is enough for a man to know all happiness. My dear ones, why do we quarrel, try to outshine each other and hold grudges against each other? Let us go to the garden, let us walk and play and love and praise and kiss each other, and bless our life."

"Your son won't last long," the doctor whispered to my mother. "From sickness he's falling into madness."

The windows of my brother's room looked into the garden, and our garden was very shady, with old trees. The spring buds were already swelling on the branches. The early birds arrived, chattering, singing through his windows. And suddenly, looking at them and admiring them, he began to ask their forgiveness too. "Birds of God, joyful birds, you too must forgive me, for I have sinned against you too." None of us could understand it then, but he was weeping with joy: "Yes," he said, "there was so much of God's glory all around me: birds, trees, meadows, sky, only I lived in shame and dishonored it all and did not notice the beauty and glory of it all."

"You take too many sins on yourself," said my mother and wept.

"Dear mother, my joy, I am weeping from gladness, not from grief; I want to be guilty before them, only I cannot explain it to you, for I do not even know how to love them. Let me be sinful before everyone, but so that everyone will forgive me, and that is Paradise. Am I not in Paradise now?"

And there was a great deal more I cannot recall or set down. I remember I went once into his room alone, when no one was with him. It was a bright evening, the sun was setting and lit up the whole room with its slanting rays. He beckoned me when he saw me: I went over to him, he took me by the shoulders with both hands and looked into my face very tenderly and lovingly. He said nothing for a minute, only looked at me like that. "Well," he said, "go now, play, live for me!"

I went out then and ran to play. And many times in my life afterwards I remembered even with tears how he told me to enjoy life for him too. There were many other marvelous and beautiful sayings of his, though we did not understand them at the time.

He died in the third week after Easter, conscious, and though he had already stopped speaking, he did not change to his last hour: he looked joyfully, with gladness in his eyes, seeking us with his eyes, smiling to us, calling to us. I was young, a child, but it all remained indelibly in my heart, the feeling was hidden there. It had to rise up and respond in due time. And so it did.

THE ENCOUNTER

J. Heinrich Arnold

The village of Tannenberg lay in a lovely valley. It was a March evening, and a young man stood on a small rise, gazing down at the peaceful scene for the last time. He wanted to take his leave. Memories of the years spent there and of the people who had crossed his way stirred in his spirit. Some he would never see again, just as he could never again relive the past.

The distant sound of a locomotive sounded through the valley, awakening a deep longing in Walter. The train followed a winding path across his view, the melodic evening church bells mingling with the rat-tat-tat of its wheels. Walter looked at his watch and started walking toward the station.

As he walked his thoughts went back to his brother-in-law Martin and the young people who had gathered around him. The holiday term that Walter had spent in Martin's house as a student was one of his brightest memories. Ten years older than Walter, Martin was one of those people whose heart holds an unresolved longing for harmony in life. He used to talk about the power of righteousness. How simple it had all seemed! Walter and the other young people longed to be completely and immediately immersed in life, and the future seemed great and lovely. Exactly how this righteousness and harmony would be sown and grow among men they didn't know, but they were filled with joyful confidence that this vision could be fulfilled. Instead, life had scattered them cruelly and wrenched their hopes for the future from them.

Walter had become a doctor. He had felt called to bring the message of God's goodness and love to people. Then the war came. Suffering arrived and hopes were shattered with the first casualty among their circle of young friends. First Kökens—hardly more than a boy—had fallen, and soon after that their teacher, West. And then, only a few days before the armistice, Martin himself had been killed.

Sadness came over Walter's face as he thought of the last meeting with Martin. That evening, Martin had read to them from *The Brothers Karamazov*. He had turned to the story of Father Zossima's younger brother. "Heart of my heart, my joyful one, believe me, each of us is guilty before everyone, for everyone and everything... One day is enough for a man to know all happiness. My dear ones, why do we quarrel, try to outshine each other and hold grudges against each other? Why don't we forgive one another?"

How depressed Martin had been on that last evening.

"Every one of us has sinned against all men, and I more than any," he had read. Surely he had been thinking about the bloody work that faced him the next day.

Walter shuddered when he remembered the expression on Martin's face as he said those words: "Why don't we forgive one another?" He repeated them to himself, and remembered how, that evening, he had felt an inner fire of hope within himself. Later he had read the chapter repeatedly, trying in vain to recall that surge of hope. But the strength that had streamed from the words was lost, and he felt only a sorrowful longing for the past.

Sunk in thought, Walter arrived at the station. The reek of lye that greeted him awakened painful memories. A flu epidemic had raged through the little town, and he had stood helplessly by many children's beds, watching them die. The sickness had raged most violently in February, and people called it the Month of Children's Death. Those days

had been the final devastating blow to Walter's faith, weakened already by the news of Martin's death. He felt as if the whole foundation of his life was shaken and cast wildly around in his mind for someone to blame. The words, "I am more guilty than any," lost their meaning. Yet he had tried to heed Martin's words, straining to free his heart from the poison of hatred and hoping that one day he might be able to forgive completely.

At 6:10 the expected train arrived and the ticket booth was opened at last. The official wore a black armband signifying a death in his family. Walter had stood at the bedside of his sick child.

When the train came in Walter found a compartment to himself and settled down in the corner. He wanted to sleep, but his heart ached with hopelessness. His thoughts wandered again to the past.

During the first days of the epidemic, Walter had hoped that his vocation to spread the strength and goodness and harmony of God would become fulfilled. But he had failed. He shuddered, remembering the hot, flushed faces of the children, the fear of death in their eyes. In his great bitterness he had cried out, "It is not true that we are all guilty for everything. These children are innocent! It would be a crime to forgive!" His hatred toward those responsible for the suffering knew no bounds. Finally even Marie, Martin's one remaining daughter, was struck down by the deadly sickness. Walter had prayed, first pleading and then demanding, but God did not heed his prayers. In the end, Walter himself was gripped by the fever. His heart was full of anger, hate, and rebellion. In his fevered delirium he sometimes lost all connection with the people around him.

Now, under orders from the doctor, he was on a journey to the Harz Mountains. "New people, new surroundings," the doctor had said, "and above all, no more brooding, my dear colleague." A tremor passed over the face of the young man. What did the brother of Father Zos-

sima say? "I don't know how to explain it to you, but everything is so simple when we understand each other." How can that be? Not even an intelligent, well-meaning person understands how things actually are.

Walter shivered. Looking out of the train window, he saw the lights of a town. As the train roared into the station, the hands of the clock pointed to shortly after midnight. Two gentlemen entered. Walter regarded the newcomers as a disturbance, and to avoid a conversation, he closed his eyes and pretended to sleep.

The light from the station shone on the face of the younger of the travelers as he looked dreamily out the window at the nighttime activity of the station. His pale face spoke of suffering. As the train began to move, he started to speak to his companion. "Thank you, Edward, for coming with me today. If my life had been fulfilled, the verdict of the doctor would not be so hard. Time flows on, who can stop it? It is so painful, the knowledge of a life of failure. That, and shock and amazement at the length of time allotted us. Time is a mystery. When it has run its course, it is gone. Nobody can give it back."

"But my dear Franklin," the older one returned, "you should not give way to these dark thoughts. You are alive! Where there is life, there is hope."

The sick man was quiet for a long time and then started to speak again. "It is good of you to try to comfort me, but the question remains: Why don't we use our time in a better way? Don't we know what a short time we have?"

"Dear Franklin, try to explain your thoughts. What do you mean by a 'life of failure'?"

"What I mean," his companion explained, "is the relationship of man to man and of men to God. A man should have a true encounter with everyone he meets. By that I mean a real understanding of what is deepest in that person. Such an encounter does not vanish with time,

which is fleeting. It stays with us; it has lasting value. Every person we meet is an opportunity to come closer to truth. I have missed so many chances. Why do we pass each other by, wrapped up in our own thoughts? Perhaps it is because we are afraid to be recognized. So often we feel such poverty and wretchedness inside us, and we try to hide that from each other. But is there any excuse for not conquering this shyness in ourselves and our neighbors? Who is our neighbor whom we should love as ourselves? That question is two thousand years old. The answer is clear. It is the first needy person we meet on the side of the road, who has no clothing, who has been robbed, who is in despair, who is forsaken. It is just this walking past the suffering of our neighbor which makes us so hard-hearted and evil.”

Walter followed the conversation with growing interest. “Excuse me,” he burst in, “your words have touched me deeply. Let me ask you this question: Isn’t life in itself terrible? Doesn’t life kill everything good, all hope, all love in us? Isn’t this the reason we have become evil? We should open our eyes to everything that has happened in the world around us. I speak from experience. Whoever has open eyes to see the suffering and the horror of his fellow man is condemned to be cold and evil. But understand—I don’t want to mock faith. I also have known other times and have precious memories which now seem to me the only thing of value in my life.”

Astonished and disapproving, the older traveler peered into the corner from which the voice came. He was worried for the inner peace of his sick friend. “Excuse me, we don’t even know your name.”

Here the other interrupted him, “Let him speak, Edward; let him free his heart.” Then he turned to Walter, “I would like to ask you a question in reply: Have you thought about why these terrible things happen? Aren’t we men the cause of our own fate?”

“No, no, and again no,” Walter said. “Children are born into this sorry world completely innocent and unaware, and if these terrible

things don't catch up with us in our childhood, we go into manhood full of hope, until reality grips us and destroys us."

"You've touched on a difficult question," Franklin replied. "But I must be open with you: your way of questioning is rebellious. While trying to find the cause of all evil, you despair and flee from your own responsibility."

Now the older one spoke up. "It is certain that there are mysterious connections between the terrible happenings here on earth and God's original plan. For me too, not everything is clear. Only one thing, young friend, we dare not lose sight of; that is, the recognition of the unchanging love behind everything that happens.

"Let me tell you a story. When I was a boy, I had a friend. His name was Paul. He lost both of his parents. Well-to-do relatives took him in as a child; they had no other children of their own. He had everything that we students longed for. Above all, he always had money. He was actually not a bad boy, just utterly thoughtless. His unbridled ways and disobedience earned him the dislike of his teachers. Even among his school comrades he was unpopular. We were hurt by his egotism and arrogance. On the other hand we envied him all his money and tried to win his friendship to gain advantages. Later I met him again at college where he was studying law. He told me that it was the knowledge that nobody loved him or understood him that had driven him to his frivolous egotism. His whole behavior had become more measured and sober. But the arrogant, mocking smile constantly playing around his mouth and the irreverent way he treated people made me keep out of his way as much as courtesy allowed. However, one day when I met him on the street, he looked at me with such terror and pleading that I couldn't imagine what had happened to him. This look remains one of the unforgettable moments of my life.

"Many years passed before our ways crossed again. When we met later on a visit to my hometown, I could hardly recognize him. A

stream of goodness flowed from him. I heard from friends that nobody knocked at his door in vain. There was not a lonely soul in the village who did not find help or comfort from Paul. One man told me how the whole town had been stirred up by the change in him, and there was a good deal of conjecture concerning its cause. There was a dark rumor in which it was told that he had been ruined in a horrible way, but no one knew the exact story. His stepmother once asked him what the cause of the change was, but Paul's answer was so remarkable that people's speculation continued all the more.

'Do you know the fable about the heart of a mother?' Paul had said. 'It goes something like this:

A long, long time ago a mother lived with her only child, a boy, in a lonely wood. For fear that the boy would be corrupted by the meanness of men, the mother moved to the most remote and secure part of the big forest.

As the boy grew older, his thoughts turned to the outside world. He dreamt of power and fortune and often asked his mother, "Where is the world? How do men live? How can one become mighty among men?"

With a sad smile the mother answered, "You are still so young, my boy."

But one day when the boy was playing by the stream his urge for the power and greatness of the world came over him with such force that he started to talk loudly to himself. Suddenly a stranger stood before him. For some reason, it seemed to the boy that the stranger grew out of his own shadow, almost as if this stranger were part of himself. The stranger told the child of the power of gold.

"And how do you obtain gold?" asked the boy.

The mysterious stranger promised him power and gold, but demanded the heart of his mother in exchange.

The boy fled, aghast. But the stranger's words haunted him day and night.

Not long after, the stranger appeared again at twilight and said, "If you bring me the heart of your mother tomorrow, you shall have as much gold and power as you desire. But this is your last chance. If you turn this down, you will live and die a simple forest peasant."

The boy could not withstand the temptation any longer. He killed his mother. He cut out her heart and hurried back through the woods to the stranger. In his haste, he did not see a deep ditch he had to jump over, and tripped and fell. As he was struggling painfully to his feet, the heart of his mother, which he clutched in his bloody hands, spoke. "My dear boy, my dearly beloved boy, did you hurt yourself?"

As he told this story to his stepmother, Paul was holding her hands in his. 'This is my story,' he told her."

The three sat in silence for a moment, and then Edward continued. "I want to tell you what Paul said when I asked him what had caused his great change. We were hiking together to the house of a friend, and that evening he was particularly friendly and had been telling me many stories of his boyhood. So I ventured to ask him. He answered, 'Have you ever truly and personally understood the power of the saying: He has loved us first?'"

Edward was quiet for a long time. Then, turning to Walter, he continued, "A man has to experience this, not just believe in it, and it cannot be taught to him by anyone else. But this love is always there. It simply exists, even when we don't recognize it. Love is above the suffering and sorrow of the earth. It was surrounding this young man long before he gave in to evil."

A terrible attack of coughing shook the sick traveler. When he began to speak, his words were continually broken by coughs: "We are all like Paul, unable even to love or believe without hate and bitterness.

"Our love is always mixed with self-love and therefore with rebellion and bitterness against life. Our love is mixed with hatred against those who seem to destroy our happiness. It will always remain so, until we realize that his love is greater than everything else. But what's the use of talking? Words fail in times like this; they can only illustrate that which is real, and to him who does not understand these things, the words

will remain a barren form. We can only really love if we understand the Love that was there at the beginning. And even more important, we must realize that this Love understands us, because the deepest sorrow a person can experience is to feel completely forsaken, completely misunderstood.”

The sick man got up and faced Walter in agitation. “I do not know your name but still I call you my friend. You have seen deep sorrow. It has made you bitter. I will not pretend that I understand you completely, but there is Someone who does. Try to grasp that. Let it penetrate you, because time is short. He also has suffered forsakenness and yet he was the only one who was innocent. He knows the suffering of all men.”

Exhausted, he sat down.

“You are right,” Walter said. “I have lost faith and trust, and it was as if the ground was pulled out from under me. But I thank you. At one time I believed that I had a special calling; I believed that I was meant to comfort and help and support my fellowmen.”

The sick man covered his face with both his hands. He wept. After a time he broke the silence, “I must thank you. Your words have helped me out of my need. I was in danger of giving in to despair. A doctor has assessed my physical condition and told me that I have the largest part of my life behind me. Looking back now, I see it has been a wasted life. Do you know how it feels to look back on your life and see that it was a failure?”

Then he smiled. “But for you and for me there is one answer, an answer that is so liberating that I can hardly bear the happiness that burns in me when I think of it. After we have experienced Love, we have to give ourselves to it completely. It is not enough to accept sacrifice; we are also allowed to—and must—give everything. You must give yourself completely. Even the belief in a special calling has to be sacrificed. He

will become everything to us. For me, I have to give up the hope of a life of work and activity. He will accept us even with a wasted life.”

The train sped on. Dawn was breaking. The three travelers sat silently, waiting for the new day.

“How much have I longed to hold this meal with you.’ These were his words on the last evening before the great suffering.” Franklin, who spoke these words, gazed out the window. The sun was rising.

“How deeply must these words have spoken to and penetrated the hearts of those who heard them. Today also, he is looking for a people to be completely his. They are his beloved whom he wants to gather. They will not let the sun set without forgiving one another their failings. They will forgive one another from heart to heart again and again. He will bow down low in love to them and will dry their tears. To all those who are broken under the sorrow of the world he will say, ‘You have suffered enough, and even if you have not recognized me in your sorrow, even if you have not understood, it will all be forgotten.’ Even for Job, sorrow was too great and incomprehensible, yet still he was found righteous.

“His people will be a suffering people, because they have undertaken to bear sorrow and pain. With their Lord, they have taken on the suffering of the world and have promised to bear it on their hearts. As their Lord wept over Jerusalem, so they will bear sorrow for the injustice of the world. Men can persecute them, men can try to extinguish and obliterate them, but they have completely surrendered to their Lord. They are ready to bear his sorrow to the bitter end, and they will overcome.

“Because their Lord has overcome death, they will be a triumphant people.”

The sick man raised himself up and his glance took in the rising sun. “The new day is breaking,” he said. “He longs also for us. With us as well, he longs to hold his meal of love. May he find us prepared.”

SOURCES AND NOTES

Heliopher — as told by Hardy Arnold

Based on a Russian legend told by Maxim Gorki as “Danko of the Burning Heart.”

The Atonement — Ludwig von Gerdtehl

Ludwig von Gerdtehl was a Baptist minister and well-known lecturer in the revival movement in Halle that Eberhard and Emmy Arnold and Else von Hollander were part of.

Sebastian: Saint of the Slums — Franz Herwig

Published in Munich, 1921, and translated by Derek Wardle. Wedding, a section of Berlin, was a notorious slum in the early 20th Century. The first Saint Sebastian was a Christian martyr, believed to have lived at the time of the “Great Persecution,” around 305 A.D.

Christopherus — Hans Thoma

*The only story in this collection from the original 1921 *Legenden*; translated by J. Heinrich Arnold and Duffy Black.*

Legends of Francis of Assisi — as told by J. Heinrich Arnold

Told at Woodcrest Bruderhof, 1979.

The Passion Flower — Otto Gillen

*From *Maria am Spinnrad*.*

Tipp and His Light — as told by J. Heinrich Arnold

The original is by Isabella Macdonald Alden, 1841–1929, a novelist.

The Pair of Shoes — Aline Glasow

As told by J. Heinrich Arnold at Woodcrest Bruderhof, 1977

The Keys of Heaven — Manfred Kyber

Manfred Kyber, a writer of legends and fantasies, was born in Latvia in 1880 and died in Germany in 1933. He and Richard von Volkmann-Leander (see above “The Keys of Heaven” and below “Heaven and Hell”) were both known and loved in the German Youth Movement.

The Dance of Robber Horrificus — Karl Heinrich Waggerl

From the book Und Es Begab Sich: Inwendige Geschichten um das Kind von Bethlehem

The Dragon and the Coffee Pot — Manfred Kyber

Translated by Duffy Black and J. Heinrich Arnold

Heaven and Hell — Richard von Volkmann-Leander

The author, a surgeon, wrote the collection Traümereien an französischen Kaminen, from which this story is taken, during the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871). Translated by Lene Schulz

The Rusted Knight — Richard von Volkmann-Leander

See note above for “Heaven and Hell”

Parsifal — as dramatized by Hardy Arnold

Based on the Grail legend, this play was written at Primavera, the Bruderhof’s Paraguayan community, in 1943, after the death of the author’s wife, Edith.

Rachoff: A True Story — Karl Joseph Friedrich

Der Fall Rachoff was first printed by the Furche Verlag, Berlin, in 1919. Based on historical fact, the original source is a summary of Rachoff’s life in Hefte zum christlichen Orient. Translated by Chris Zimmerman

Serpentino — Phillip Krämer

First published by the Furche Verlag, Berlin, during World War I.

Father Zossima’s Brother — Fyodor Dostoyevsky

Both of these stories are excerpts from The Brothers Karamazov

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